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Kilili bill would provide fed funds for earned income tax credit. » PAGE 7

Hafa Adai!

Saipan Tribune

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THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

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WITH MANY CW PERMITS EXPIRING ON DEC. 31

Kilili, USCIS working to remedy delay

By MARK RABAGO
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ASSOCIATE EDITOR

A 48-year-old wait staff at a restaurant is having sleepless nights as his CW-1 permit has yet to be adjudicated by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service less than a month before his current permit expires on Dec. 31, 2015.

Sonny (not his real name) is one of probably hundreds of CW-1 permit holders who are on pins and needles waiting for USCIS' decision on their renewal permits.

Under USCIS rules, a CW-1 permit holder should stop work immediately after his permit expires. But Sonny, who hails

See KILILI on Page 4

Rodents possible culprit in airport lighting glitch

By DAISY DEMAPAN
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REPORTER

The Francisco C. Ada International Airport's airfield runway lights are back on since Monday morning after an emergency prompted the suspension of night flights over the weekend when the runway's electrical lighting system was found to be only 30 percent lit, forcing the shutdown of the system to avoid circuit-shorting, fluctuations and burning out the entire electrical system.

The CPA board, which approved the emergency procurement of services for a company that specializes in electrical systems, authorized the provisional hiring of two electricians who have located

See RODENTS on Page 4

Parole votes to commute Manila's 60-year sentence

Chief parole officer Shirley Camacho-Ogumoro shows a document to CNMI Board of Parole chair Ramon B. Camacho while board members and the board's counsel look on shortly before Camacho announced the board's decision to support the commutation of Reynaldo A. Manila's 60-year prison sentence in the death his goddaughter in 2000. In the other photo, Manila, now 54 years old, waits for the decision of the CNMI Board of Parole.

FERDIE DE LA TORRE

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

» Final decision now rests with the governor

The CNMI Board of Parole unanimously voted yesterday to support commuting the 60-year prison sentence of Reynaldo A. Manila, who was convicted in 2002 for the death of his 6-month-old goddaughter.

The six-member board chaired by Ramon B. Camacho reached the decision after listening to the testimonies of three persons, including the baby's parents, who opposed commutation, and five others who supported commuting Manila's sentence.

The board also read two letters that supported commutation. Only a few people attended

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INSIDE

BUSINESS

Martin Shkreli, the "most hated man in America," is terminated from his job.

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ASIA

Rescuers pulled one body but 81 people were still missing in a landslide in China.

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LIFE & STYLE

The Miss Universe pageant and host Steve Harvey doubled down on the apologies.

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Local

Motorist allegedly yields 'ice,' drug paraphernalia

A motorist who was pulled over for traffic violations was allegedly found in possession of methamphetamine or "ice" and other drug paraphernalia in Kagman 3 early Monday morning.

Dusty Nisarafach, 48, was arrested for illegal possession of a controlled substance. He was also cited for having an expired vehicle registration and not having a valid driver's license.

At a hearing yesterday, Superior Court Associate Judge Joseph N. Camacho kept the $10,000 cash bail the court originally imposed.

Assistant public defender Tillman Clark was appointed as counsel for Nisarafach. Assistant attorney general Barbara Cepeda appeared for the government.

Police detective Andrew S. Taimanao stated in his report that two police officers saw a Toyota Corolla car that has no 2016 green sticker leaving the Cool Laundry and Poker in Kagman 3 on Monday at 2:27am.

The officers learned from the Department of Public Safety Central that the car's registration expired on Jan. 31, 2015. The officers then made a violator stop of the car in front of Laolao Bay Golf and Resort for expired registration.

While one officer was talking to the driver, identified as Nisarafach, he noticed a white ziplock baggy with a glass tube in it hidden on the side of the driver's seat and the center console.

Nisarafach told the officer that he does not have any driver's license.

Nisarafach was then arrested for not having a valid driver's license or a valid identification card while operating a motor vehicle.

Asked about the baggy and the glass pipe, the suspect denied ownership of the items.

During a search of the car, one officer found two glass tubes and some baggies containing crystalline residue. A ziplock bag containing a crystalline substance was also found in the sunglass case and a weight scale was recovered from underneath the passenger seat.

The crystalline substance tested presumptive positive for "ice."

Nisarafach has a previous "ice" case.

On Feb. 12, 2013, Nisarafach pleaded guilty to possession of a controlled substance. He was placed on probation for a year plus other conditions. In that case, the judge ruled that if Nisarafach fails to abide with the terms of his probation, he will be sentenced to a year in prison, without the possibility of parole. ***(Ferdie de la Torre)***

Judge revokes pretrial release of Macabalo

U.S. District Court for the NMI Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglona has revoked the pretrial release of Alexandro Castro Macabalo for smoking methamphetamine or "ice" and violating other pre-trial conditions.

At a hearing late Monday afternoon, Manglona found that Macabalo violated her conditions of pre-trial release and that no condition will reasonably assure her appearance in court.

Manglona ordered Macabalo to be detained pending trial. She was remanded to the custody of the U.S. Marshal.

Assistant U.S. attorney Garth Backe, as counsel for the U.S. government, asked the court that Macabalo be detained pending trial for violations of her pre-trial release.

Backe called to the stand the U.S. government's witness, U.S. Probation officer assistant Juanette David-Atalig, who testified that Macabalo tested positive for the use of "ice" during a random drug test last Dec. 3 at the defendant's home on Saipan.

David-Atalig said Macabalo also failed to appear for a scheduled group counseling last Dec. 12 and also did not attend her mental health appointment at the Commonwealth Health Center last Dec. 11.

Macabalo also failed to report to the U.S. Probation Office and failed to submit to location monitoring, she said.

The U.S. Marshal Service arrested Macabalo last Thursday.

Macabalo is facing a charge in federal court for enticing her then-15-year-old cousin to engage in sex for cash with a government official in 2013. She is being represented by court-appointed counsel Bruce Berline. ***(Ferdie de la Torre)***

'CUC apprenticeship program needs to be accredited'

By DAISY DEMAPAN
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REPORTER

The apprenticeship program being proposed for the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. needs to be coordinated with the Northern Marianas Technical Institute or the Northern Marianas College in order to produce qualified trades personnel, according to CUC board member David Sablan Jr.

Referring to the minutes of the last CUC board meeting, Sablan wanted to clarify that a true apprenticeship program must be U.S. Department of Labor certified.

"I just wanted to clarify that this is not necessarily the apprenticeship program I was thinking about [when the idea was originally proposed] but it does add toward the development of local workers to take on the various trades within our divisions. I would like [the board] to continue the establishment of a United States Department of Labor certified apprenticeship program," he said.

He recommended working with an accredited institution such as the Northern Marianas College in order to provide "scholastic training."

"…You [wouldn't] want our local tradesmen that are training to take on positions within generation and transmission distribution divisions…to start being journeymen after only a 60-day training or 90-day training. There is a very distinct prescription of apprenticeships and it has to go through the USDOL [to be approved]," he said.

Board chair Adelina Roberto noted that the apprenticeship program is being modeled after the curriculum of the Guam Community College.

The board stated that an MOU is being worked on to bring the existent GCC program to the CNMI before the apprenticeship program can move forward.

Legislature treats *man'amko* to Christmas luncheon

By MARK RABAGO
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ASSOCIATE EDITOR

MARK RABAGO

Congregates of the Aging Center and staff led by director Walter Manglona pose with members of the House of Representatives and Senate during the Legislature's annual Christmas luncheon for the *man'amko* at the House chamber yesterday.

The House of Representatives and Senate played Santa Claus yesterday to more than 70 congregates of the CNMI Aging Center as the island's *man'amko* went up to Capital Hill for the Legislature's annual Christmas luncheon.

The House chamber was jam-packed, with House members yielding their seats to the *man'amko* and gamely sitting on folding chairs in the periphery, accompanied by their counterparts from the Senate.

A select group of congregates serenaded the lawmakers and everyone in attendance with classic Christmas carols like *Silent Night*, *Joy To The World*, *Holy Night*, *Feliz Navidad*, and a medley of Chamorro and Carolinian Christmas jingles.

After the enthusiastic presentation, the *man'amko* were treated to a feast that included ham, pancit, meatballs, mashed potatoes, and broccoli salad. There was so much food that a number of *man'amko* and other guests took home *balutan*.

The *man'amko*, as per tradition, also asked for cash donations from the lawmakers, passing around a jar that was soon full of greenbacks. Senators, however, didn't have to drop their donations in the jar, as they came well prepared and gave an envelope full of money instead.

Aging Center director Walter Manglona and Saipan Senior Advisory Council president Maria Taitano Salinas thanked the House and Senate for hosting the Christmas luncheon for the third straight year.

Manglona also thanked the lawmakers for always looking after the interests of the islands' senior citizens.

"Thank you for all the hard work you've done. A lot of the stuff you've been doing, providing protection to our senior citizens, you've been doing that in the previous years and we really appreciate that," he said.

Salinas thanked the House and Senate for again welcoming them to the Legislature and hosting the Christmas luncheon.

"I'm very pleased to be here. I feel very welcome. Hope we will have fun today and collected a lot of money. We went through a very hard typhoon condition [when] Soudelor [hit us] but we showed that we can overcome," she said.

"Thank you to all to our legislators. You have our support 100 percent. It's a great honor to be up here. I'm out of words. We're prepared to face the New Year and the *man'amko* is the pulling factor to push and show our youngsters that we're ready to work hard," added Salinas.

House Speaker Joseph Deleon Guerrero (Ind-Saipan) said this is the third year that the Legislature has hosted the *man'amko* and both the House and the Senate make it a point to host it every year because they value the contributions of the CNMI's elderly.

"Every year you come here and sing your carols and you just lift up our spirits. Thank you again *man'amko* for bringing the spirit of joy and peace this Christmas season. We hope your blessings here will stay with us and guide us as we do the good that you expect from us," he said.

Senate President Victor Hocog (Ind-Rota) gave kudos to the *man'amko* for their resilience the past year, which saw them endure Typhoon Soudelor and voluntarily allow typhoon victims to use the Aging Center in China Town as one of the evacuation centers for months.

"Despite all the hardships that we experienced the past few months we're all here together now. It's our hope that we will continue to treasure all of you *man'amko* as there also will come a time that we will become like you, facing our new leaders of tomorrow."

Hocog said he would soon join them at the *man'amko* center after admitting that he is already qualified.

"Pretty soon, I told Walter, that I would register myself. I'm already qualified as a senior citizen as well. I admire the strength of the *man'amko*. We listen to you and listen to your guidance and your advice. Whether it's fair or unfair we'll take it constructively so we can bring the best service this Legislature can do for you," he added.

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Propst wants to penalize businesses snared in illegal drugs

CUC rate consultant to arrive in January

Representatives of economist.com, the rate regulatory consulting company of the Commonwealth Utilities Corp., is set to arrive on the island in the first two weeks of January.

According to legal counsel James Sirok, the Fuel Adjustment Charge or FAC, formerly known as the Levelized Energy Adjustment Clause, is in need of attention.

Due to the weather and storms experienced in the last few months, despite the changing fuel prices, CUC was unable to perform a rate calculation so as to calculate overpayments and disburse the monies back to customers.

Board member Joe Torres said that while the FAC is important, adjusting water rates should also be considered in the future.

Sirok said that U.S. District Court for the NMI designated Judge David O. Carter will also be paying CUC a visit come January for a status conference on Jan. 26 to ensure CUC's compliance with stipulated court orders.

Earlier this month, Carter expressed the urgency for CUC to complete its new pipeline.

The oil pipeline project is an 8-inch aboveground receiving pipeline that delivers diesel from the Mobil oil facility to CUC Power Plants 1 and 2 in Lower Base. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has stated that the pipeline must be properly replaced as it poses an irreparable environmental harm. ***(Daisy Demapan)***

Rep. Edwin K. Propst (Ind-Saipan) is set to introduce a bill that seeks to establish a more severe penalty for businesses that engage in drug-related activities.

The freshman lawmaker wants businesses caught dabbling in illegal drugs to be fined a minimum of $250,000 and have their business license revoked for a year. He said this penalty is separate from any criminal fees, fines, and penalties under the current law.

The fines collected from erring companies, Propst suggests, would be divvied up as follows: 25 percent to the Department of Public Safety for drug enforcement purposes; 25 percent to the Division of Customs for drug enforcement purposes; 25 percent to the CNMI drug court; and 25 percent to the general fund.

Propst's introduction of what he terms the "Commercial Business-Drug Control Act of 2016" comes as the Division of Customs, for a second time, found a cache of methamphetamine or "ice" in a cargo container brought in by Sunleader, a cargo consolidating company on Saipan.

Propst, in the bill he is set to introduce, said, "The Legislature finds that certain business establishments, both small and large, have engaged and/or are engaging in illicit drug trade. This illegal activity continues to negatively affect our residents and our great Commonwealth as a whole."

He added that businesses that have been caught engaging in such activities continue to conduct business operations with the CNMI.

To remedy this, Propst wants appropriate measures taken to penalize business establishments that also engage in the illegal drug business.

Last Dec. 2, Customs found 4.9 lbs of "ice" with a street value of around $850,000 inside a 5-gallon paint container inside a cargo container belonging to Sunleader during a routine inspection at the Port of Saipan.

Nearly five months earlier, a Customs inspector detected "ice" in an air compressor in a container from Guangzhou, China, at the seaport warehouse. The illegal drugs found weighed 23 lbs and worth between $3.2 million and $4.3 million. The container where the compressor was found also belonged to Sunleader. ***(Mark Rabago)***

RODENTS

From Page 1

the problem areas.

One of the electricians from the Guam International Airport Authority, Richard Cabrera, was able to locate the problems with the assistance of Saipan's Air Operations Area or AOA and Federal Aviation Administration personnel from Guam and Saipan.

According to airport manager Ed Mendiola, the repair team was able to replace the damaged cables. Along the way, he said, they also identified runway lights that had burned out bulbs that have recently been replaced.

As to the cause of the outage, Mendiola said that Cabrera found it difficult to pinpoint the exact cause other than the fact that the circuit shortage caused electrical cables to burn, thereby rendering the lights out of service.

"One possible cause may have been from rodents in the electrical conduits. They may have chewed some of the cable insulations and exposed the wires, causing it to ground by touching the base of the cans holding the light fixtures," he said.

Mendiola said that grounding a live high voltage wire will practically burn anything it touches, which also may have been the case with the outage of the airfield lights.

He reiterated that the airport has been able to restore the lights back to 100 percent functionality.

KILILI

From Page 1

from the Philippines, said that stopping from work is not an option as the father of six has living expenses to meet.

"Are we just going to stop eating and using electricity? How about the rent in our apartment and payment of utilities? How are we going to pay for gas for our cars? Who's going to pay for all of that? And besides it's Christmas and the New Year. I really hope USCIS approves my permit soon," he told *Saipan Tribune*.

For many businesses such as hotels, the idea of stopping as much as a third of their workforce from working on one of the busiest nights of the year, Dec. 31, is also not an option.

As of Dec. 1, 2015, USCIS has approved a total of 9,195 beneficiaries under the CW-Only Nonimmigrant Transitional Worker program and denied 1,092.

The 9,195 counts against the 2015 cap of 12,999 set by the USCIS earlier in the year.

Delegate Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan (Ind-MP) said he is aware of the anxiety not only on the part of CW-1 permit holders but their employers as well. He said a number of businesses have already approached him about the delay in the issuance of CW-1 renewal permits.

"The congressional office continues to work with employers who come seeking our help with their CW visa petitions. I cannot name the companies or petitioners because when anyone comes to us for assistance, their case is treated with complete confidentiality," he told *Saipan Tribune* in an email.

He also confirmed what USCIS told *Saipan Tribune* about the current number of approved and denied CW-1 petitions. "And I can report that there were 9,195 CW visa beneficiaries as of December 1, 2015."

Sablan said the high number of approvals would mean that USCIS has adjudicated majority of the CW-1 permit petitions.

"I cannot provide you with an answer to your general statement that a lot of CW workers have stopped working because while not all 9,195 are CW-1 visas, this number of beneficiaries of CW visas certainly reflects that most petitions are approved."

Sablan said he continues to push for solutions to help the CNMI, its businesses, and contract workers from the annual drama of looking at their permit deadlines in the calendar without the permit approvals in sight.

"I have also written to [Department of Homeland Security] Secretary [Jeh C.] Johnson urging his approval of the Proposed Rule, Enhancing Opportunities for H-1B1, CW-1, and E3 Nonimmigrants and EB-1 Immigrants, which would have provided a 240-day grace period for Departmental action on petitions reviews," he said.

Sablan had proposed to DHS to have CW-1 workers be allowed to continue working for up to 240 days or eight months while their CW permit renewal applications are being processed.

Saipan Chamber of Commerce president Alex Sablan said the delay in the adjudication of CW-1 permits is unfortunate and that many Chamber members are worried about its impact on businesses once the clock strikes midnight on Dec. 31, 2015.

On his own, Sablan surmises that the reasons for the delay in the issuance of CW-1 renewals could be: USCIS waiting for the cap on CW-1 permits that now stand at 12,999; delay in the decision to extend the CW program after Dec. 31, 2014; and the jump in applications for CW permits because of new developers such as Best Sunshine International, Ltd., Honest Profit, and Alter City Group.

Sablan said one solution is to have businesses petition qualified workers for U.S. visa categories other than CW-1 or have companies that need temporary workers apply for temporary visa status.

Reyes Reyes, founding president of Marianas Advocates for Humanitarian Affairs Ltd., said he is calling not only on Sablan but the administration of Gov. Eloy S. Inos and the entire business community to find a solution to the impending crisis out-of-work contract workers will experience because of their expired CW-1 permits.

"Some have already stopped working. They don't want to name their companies because of fear that they would not be allowed to return to work once their permits are approved. Their concern is what will happen to their financial situation especially with the holidays approaching. It's almost Dec. 31 and they will be losing their status. Most of these workers I talked to also have U.S. citizen children, so the children will suffer."

Reyes said that local businesses would also stand to lose a lot with the absence of experience, skilled, and long-term foreign workers.

"What will happen to local businesses? They will be losing skilled workers as well as experienced CWs. Their operations will be paralyzed. It's a pity because the economy is growing while the workforce is decreasing."

He also requested USCIS to give some clarification on the whole situation and provide updates on why they are having delays in the processing of CW-1 permits.

"We're calling also on the USCIS. We understand the backlogs but at least give some positive words to all concerned employees and employers so it will not create panic," he said.

PAROLE

From Page 1

the hearing held at the Pedro P. Tenorio Multi-Purpose Center in Susupe.

Manila, now 54 years old, appeared at the hearing without a lawyer. He has been in prison for 15 years now.

In an interview, Board of Parole chair Camacho said that clemency has four categories: absolute pardon, partial pardon, conditional pardon, and commutation.

Camacho said the board conducted a separate vote, in which each member filled up the voting form.

According to Camacho, commutation just reduces the sentence. That means jail time or fine, or both, could be removed but that the beneficiary remains convicted of the offense.

Camacho said that Manila applied for commutation through the Office of the Governor and that acting governor Ralph DLG Torres consulted the board, prompting the hearing.

He said if the governor signs the commutation, the federal government will take over in deciding whether to remove Manila from the CNMI or blacklisting him.

Without the commutation, Manila's sentenced would not be reduced and he would not be eligible for anything, Camacho said.

He stressed, though, that the board's vote is not final until he submits a letter about the board's decision to the governor. He said the governor and the acting governor will make the final decision.

When asked why he supported commutation, Camacho said it is better than granting a full pardon because he does not believe in "zeroing it out."

Camacho said Manila has a major eye issue that apparently can affect his brain and that the CNMI government cannot entertain that kind of case.

Assistant attorney general Matthew Baisley cited a number of reasons why the government opposed the commutation of sentence.

One, Baisley said, Manila is still five years away from becoming eligible for parole.

He said Manila was sentenced to 60 years in prison but he has served only 15 years of that sentence so far.

"He is not eligible for parole until 20 years. So to commute the sentence now means that he served a very small sentence versus what the judge sentenced him to," he said.

Two, the prosecutor said, the reason for the hearing is really about Manila's medical condition but there is no record or evidence that his medical condition is of immediate concern. It also seems possible, he said, that the government could take Manila to Guam for treatment.

"In other words, not release him, keep him under custody, get him the treatment that he needs," he said.

Baisley said they also believe that Manila could be released temporarily with instruction to return to the CNMI.

"That's the most ideal situation, but basically as opposed to commuting the sentence, he could be released to get treatment with an instruction to come back. If he did not come back we can initiate extradition proceedings," the prosecutor said.

Baisley said what Manila did is a very serious crime.

The baby's parents, who are Filipinos, have six children, including the infant who died. The father said they were not prepared for the hearing because they first learned about it only last Friday when a friend informed them about the scheduled hearing upon reading *Saipan Tribune*'s story.

The father said how can they forgive Manila when he never asked for it.

In support of the commutation, Pastor Manuelito Rey said he believes in restorative justice, "which is a theory that actually helps address the need of people who would like to understand the cause of crime and repair the harm caused by it."

Rey said Manila is not a member of their church when he entered the Department of Corrections, but he came to know him 15 years ago when he conducted a Bible study inside DOC.

"I support his commutation because he is a changed person. And considering his physical or medical condition, he needs that," Rey said.

Manila, a Filipino national, was 39 years old when then-Superior Court Associate Judge Virginia Sablan-Onerheim sentenced him in June 2002 to 60 years in prison for second-degree murder over the death of the infant.

The baby lingered in the hospital for several days before dying on Nov. 6, 2000.

A jury found Manila guilty of second-degree murder and child abuse.

At the sentencing, Manila insisted he did not kill the baby. He has a child in the Philippines.

Then-chief prosecutor Clyde Lemons noted that a doctor testified that the baby had 11 bruises at the back of her head consistent with blunt force trauma or being hit with an object.

Lemons said the doctor testified that the baby was shaken "very hard," consistent with shaken baby syndrome.

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50 YEARS AFTER THE MIRANDA DECISION

Essay, video contests for NMI high school students

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Miranda decision next year, the U.S. District Court for the District of the Northern Mariana Islands and the Ninth Circuit Courts and Community Committee is sponsoring an essay and video contest for high school students in the Northern Mariana Islands.

Cash prizes in both contests is $2,000 for first place, $1,000 for second place, and $500 for third place.

In 2016, the nation marks the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in Miranda v. Arizona. In that 1996 case, the court ruled that someone taken into police custody must be informed—prior to questioning—of their Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination. Now referred to as a "Miranda Warning" or a recitation of "Miranda Rights," police must advise persons in custody of their right to remain silent and their right to an attorney.

The 2016 Ninth Circuit Civics Scholarship Contests asks high school students to consider how Miranda rights came to be defined, how they are safeguarded by the federal courts and why they are so important to our system of justice.

The contest has two components: 1) Individual students can express their thoughts and ideas in an essay of 500 to 750 words, and 2) Individual students or teams of up to three students may submit a 2-3 minute video presentation on the theme. Students may participate in one or both competitions.

The contest is open to students in nine western states, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands. Sophomores, juniors and seniors in public, private and parochial high schools and home-schooled students of equivalent status may participate. The contest begins Jan. 1, 2016, and ends on April 15, 2016. Circuit contest winners will be announced in June. Cash prizes will be awarded to the top three finishers in both the essay and video competitions. Contest rules, entry instructions and other information are available at http://ca9.uscourts.gov/civicscontest.

The U.S. District Court for the District of the Northern Mariana Islands will conduct preliminary judging for the contest. The top three finishers in the essay and video competitions at the district level will go on to compete in the Ninth Circuit contest. Students must reside in the Northern Mariana Islands.

For more information about the district judging, contact Amanda Hayes at (670) 237-1230 or via email at amanda_hayes@nmid.uscourts.gov. ***(PR)***

300 kids receive toys from Karidat

By JON PEREZ
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REPORTER

Over 300 children have already received their gifts from Karidat, with a few more needing to be picked up by families who registered for the annual Christmas Toy Drive by the social services group.

Karidat executive director Lauri Ogumoro said they have been calling all the families who registered for their yearly project to inform them that the donated toys are now wrapped and ready for their kids to enjoy and play with.

"We're almost all out of toys and we have already given out more than 300. We're just finishing up and giving away some more toys that was donated. There are still a few more toys left [yesterday]," said Ogumoro.

"We've been calling the families who registered that their gift is ready to be picked up here at out office in Chalan Piao up to [today]," she added.

The toys came from various groups, organizations, businesses, individuals, and other private donors that wanted to cheer hundreds of kids, especially after the devastation brought by Typhoon Soudelor.

"We gave out wonderful toys, especially to needy families who lost everything after the typhoon. We want their kids to experience the joy of receiving a gift this Christmas," Ogumoro said.

Karidat staff member Elaine Dela Cruz said that Karidat has been giving away toys to kids throughout the years. "They are donated by generous people. This has been Karidat's project for many years."

Ogumoro said that Karidat is thankful to all the groups and individuals that donated the toys. Each child received one toy.

"We received a wonderful support from the community. For that, we're really thankful to all who became part of this project," she added.

"There were a lot who donated the toys and it would be hard to mention all of them, so a big thank you to all."

The Saipan Young Professionals, McDonald's, Matua Riders, the Northern Marianas College counseling program, and Hyatt Regency Saipan are some of the groups that donated the toys.

Hyatt has been a consistent donor of the Karidat Christmas toy drive and each year a different group makes their donation.

The U.S. Marine Corps started the Toys for Tots project and was continued by Karidat.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Ten participants are presented with certificates of completion after undergoing training in caregiving at the Northern Marianas College.

Participants complete caregiver training at NMC

Ten participants recently completed 24 hours of training in caregiving with an emphasis on developmental disabilities, aging and physical disabilities at the Northern Marianas College, Nursing Program.

The training was made possible as part of a collaborative partnership with the CNMI Ayuda Network's Commonwealth Respite Services Program and NMC's Pacific Basin University Centers of Developmental Disabilities, according to UCEDD director Floyd Masga.

A caregiver is a person who helps another individual with impairment with his or her activities of daily living. Any person with health impairments might use caregiving services to address their difficulties. Caregiving is most commonly used to address impairments related to old age, disability, a disease, or a mental disorder.

Pamela Sablan, Developmental Disabilities Council executive director and Ayuda Network board chair, said that the Commonwealth may have as many as 800 families providing long-term care at home to family members with little or no help.

Public Law 14-36, or the Community Respite Services Program, was created to develop and encourage statewide coordination of respite services and to work with community-based private nonprofit or for-profit agencies, public agencies, and interested citizen groups in the establishment of community lifespan respite services programs.

With the increasingly aging population within the Commonwealth, the role of caregiver has been more recognized as an important one, both functionally and economically, Sablan said.

She said the typical duties of a caregiver might include taking care of someone who has a chronic illness or disease; managing medications or talking to doctors and nurses on someone's behalf; helping to bathe or dress someone who is frail or disabled; or taking care of household chores, meals, or bills for someone who cannot do these things alone.

Nursing program director Rosa Tudela and nursing instructor Johnny Aldan handled the course, which was paid with federal funds made possible by a grant from the Pacific Basin University Centers of Developmental Disabilities. ***(NMC)***

House OKs bill to lower age of staff allowed to handle alcoholic drinks

The House of Representatives on Monday passed a bill lowering the age requirement from 21 to 18 years old of employees who are allowed to handle and serve any alcoholic beverages at any on-sale establishment.

House Bill 19-104, authored by Rep. Antonio P. Sablan (Ind-Saipan), passed with 19 affirmative votes with one dissension from Rep. Edwin K. Propst (Ind-Saipan).

The bill states: "Business establishments, most especially restaurants that are licensed to serve alcohol, provide work opportunities for individuals who are 18 years of age."

However, current law limits employees who are 18 years of age from performing certain duties and eventually getting hired because they are not allowed to handle alcoholic drinks.

"The Legislature further finds that for employment purposes it would make sense to allow employees who are 18 years of age to serve and handle alcohol," the bill stated.

H.B. 19-104 amends 4 CMC Section 5565 (Minor: Mixing or Serving Prohibited) to read, "A license, his agent or employee shall not permit any person under the age of 18 years to mix or serve any alcoholic beverages at any on-sale establishment." The bill now heads for the Senate for action. ***(Mark Rabago)***

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Kilili bill would provide fed funds for earned income tax credit

Delegate Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan (Ind-MP) introduced legislation on Friday that would provide federal funds to cover the cost of the earned income tax credit in the Northern Mariana Islands and other U.S. insular areas. His bill, H.R. 4309, would allow taxpayers in the Northern Marianas to receive a refundable tax credit, if they have earned income in a given year.

"The earned income tax credit is an important public policy," Sablan said, "because it rewards people for working. Even if people have to work for low wages, which many people do in the Northern Marianas, it will still be worthwhile to get a job, because there will be this extra supplemental income from the government."

The Commonwealth tried to provide the earned income tax credit to its people in the 1990s, but had to discontinue the program because it was too expensive for the local government.

Both Guam and the Virgin Islands have an earned income tax credit program in place, which they pay for with local funds. Sablan's proposal would cover the cost with federal funds.

"This would work in the same way that families in the Northern Marianas are now getting the refundable child tax credit each year," Sablan explained. "Taxpayers would file their return with the Commonwealth government. Then the federal government would provide the money to cover the cost of the earned income tax credit. The Commonwealth would make the payments to individual taxpayers."

Sablan modeled his legislation after two provisions in the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. That law made federal funds available to the Commonwealth government to cover the cost of the Making Work Pay tax credit and the American Opportunity tax credit for families with children in college.

"One of the big wins in the tax extenders that was passed on Friday and signed by the President was making the American Opportunity tax credit permanent," Sablan said. "The credit had been scheduled to phase out in 2017. But now families will continue to be able to claim a $2,500 tax credit each year for each of their eligible college students. That is worth $10,000 over the course of a four year undergraduate program."

Changes in the federal tax code can be difficult to achieve, and H.R. 4309 could be costly. However, Sablan believes it is important to put the idea on the table for consideration.

"In the event that we take up comprehensive tax reform legislation in the next several years, or some other legislative opportunity presents itself, I want to be ready," said Sablan. ***(Office of the Delegate)***

Mochitsuki Festival to end Christmas in the Marianas

By JON PEREZ
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REPORTER

Japan's Mochitsuki Festival will highlight the final Saturday of celebration of the Christmas in the Marianas Festival on Dec. 26 at the Paseo de Marianas in Garapan.

Mochitsuki is a Japanese ceremony for making rice cakes made of *mochigom*—glutinous short-grain japonica rice. Participants pound the rice into a paste that will be molded into various shapes.

The mochi rice cake is a traditional food prepared before the Japanese New Year.

The festival will start at 6pm where rice pounding and dance performances by the Saipan Awaodori Team will greet local and foreign visitors that will join the event.

Dances and other forms of musical entertainment will also be featured up to 10pm.

Last Saturday, a young K-Pop dance group from the Korean Association of Saipan joined in the festivities.

Koblerville Elementary School, despite placing second in the Christmas carol contest in the elementary division, had the most unique performance. They sang a medley of Christmas carol mashed up with OMI's *Cheerleader* and *Soul Sister* by American rock band Train, changing the lyrics to match the holiday season.

KES administration officer Kevin Adachi said that fourth and fifth graders wrote the lyrics that replaced the original versions of *Cheerleader* and *Soul Sister*.

"We held a competition among the students where they must submit the lyrics that will be adapted and replace the original lyrics of *Cheerleader* and *Soul Sister*. The winning lyrics were used in the presentation," said Adachi.

"So it was really the students who wrote the new lyrics with the guidance of the teachers," he added.

KES also topped the Christmas costumes category and finished third in the float competition.

BIRTHDAY SHOUTOUT

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Happy birthday greeting go out to Cozie Camacho, who finally turns 21 today! Happy birthday, merry Christmas, happy new year but most of all happy 21st. Flaunt that ID, lady. We love you, from your Pak-Pak family.

SHRM NMI sets annual conference on Dec. 29

The Society for Human Resource Management NMI Chapter announced yesterday that its 2015 Annual Conference will be held on Dec. 29 at the Pacific Islands Club's Charley›s. All SHRM members and other interested HR and management practitioners are invited to come and enjoy this final meeting of 2015.

The one-half day program will feature acting governor Ralph DLG Torres as its main speaker. Torres will discuss the ongoing push for 902 talks with the federal government and what the business community can expect in the coming year.

This year›s program will cover two topics. Attorneys Maya Kara and Bruce Mailman will join the morning session to address the increasingly significant issue of visa options for nonresident workers. After lunch, attorney Mark Hanson will speak on the topic of determining an employee's overtime status.

Both issues are of current interest and significance to all HR professionals and managers. These topics will help bring HR practitioners up-to-date on the visa and green card process, as well as help properly classify employees to ensure compliance with the law.

This lunch meeting will be held at the PIC Charley's on Tuesday, Dec. 29, 2015, from 8am to 2pm. The program will open with registration and morning snacks at 8am, with the welcoming remarks at 9am, followed by the morning program. There will be a break for lunch at 11:30am to 12:30pm with the acting governor›s address, followed by the afternoon program.

This presentation is open to the public and will be an invaluable opportunity for employers and HR professionals and staff to better understand their visa options and the process for determining overtime status.

The presentation includes the PIC lunch buffet at the cost of $30 for SHRM members and $40 for non-members. Seats are limited, so reserve your seat by contacting Micah Parico-Acuavera by phone at 234-1795 or by email at corpoffice@triplejsaipan.com or by email to Frank Gibson at flgibson@yahoo.com.

SHRM is the world's largest association devoted to human resource management. The NMI Chapter is affiliated with the national organization. For more information about the NMI Chapter, visit their website at http://nmichapter.shrm.org. ***(SHRM)***

Last day of the temporary issuance will be December 31, 2015.

WIC Temporary Issuance of Milk During Typhoon Soudelor Recovery

1 ea. of 1 Quart Whole Milk = 4 ea. of 8 fl. oz. Anchor Lite Milk

1 ea. of 1 Quart 1% on Non-Fat or Skim Milk = 4 ea. of 8 fl. oz. Gossner 1% Low-Fat Milk

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CNMI

VIVA POKER
Grand Opening
GRAND PRIZE
WIN ME
2015 mazda 3
CONSOLATION $1,000
1ST PRIZE $3,000
2ND PRIZE $2,000
Going Bonanza Drawing for Raffle Prizes
December 24, 2015, at 8:00pm to 9:00pm
Viva Poker, Chalan Piao • Tel: (670) 234-0022
Royal Flush 5 tickets 10 tickets 20 tickets
5 of a Kind 2 tickets 5 tickets 7 tickets
Straight Flush 1 ticket 3 tickets 5 tickets
5 BET
10 BET
20 BET
Must be present and with valid ID to win

USP4GG vows to continue its advocacies in 2016

The U.S. Pinoys for Good Governance thanked everyone who became part of their programs this year and vowed to continue their advocacies in 2016.

USPGG chairperson Dr. Celia B. Lamkin, in a telephone message to members during their group's appreciation night last Friday, said they would continue helping their countrymen especially those who are in need.

"We appreciate all the help that was given to USPGG for our accomplishments this year. We hope for their continued support in order for us to help uplift the lives of Pinoys everywhere," said Lamkin, who failed to attend due to health reasons.

USPGG Marianas chapter member Juan Gacayan Jr. said Filipinos must be united in order for the Philippines to move forward.

"It's good to see Filipinos united even if they are in another country. Being divided will get you nowhere. USPGG has a lot of good programs; all we need is cooperation and to help each other," said Gacayan in Tagalog.

The appreciation night also served as the group's Christmas party where more than 30 members shared a simple dinner.

Parlor games were then held to entertain everyone. ***(Jon Perez)***

JON PEREZ
Members of the U.S. Pinoys for Good Governance pose for a group photo before the celebration of their appreciation and Christmas party last Friday at the San Antonio Parish hall.

FEMA approves 10 more applicants

By DAISY DEMAPAN
daisy_demapan@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

As of Dec. 21, 2015, the Federal Emergency Management Agency approved an additional 10 applications for individual assistance from the 4,802 applicants two weeks ago, for a total of $24.5 million approved under the individual and households program, $16.9 million for housing assistance, and $7.5 million in other needs assistance such as furnishings, transportation, and medical needs.

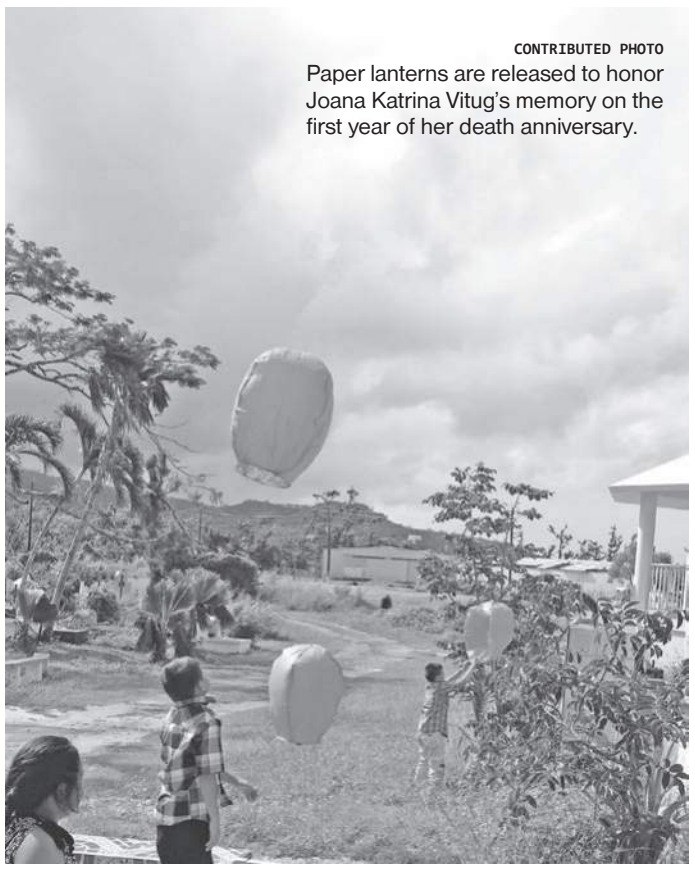
For public assistance, $12.5 million have been obligated or made available via electronic transfer, which is an additional $3.3 million from the previous weeks' $9.2 million obligated assistance.

Although the Disaster Recovery Center closed last Friday, FEMA still remains just a phone call away.

Typhoon Soudelor survivors who have registered with FEMA can call the toll free registration number to get help with the application process.

For help with status updates, appeals and other questions call 1-800-621-3362 or for those who have a speech disability or hearing loss, call 1-800-462-7585.

The CNMI is still providing free fax services for those who need to get documents for their appeals to FEMA at the Saipan Mayor's Office from 7:30am to 4:30pm on weekdays and at the Joeten Kiyu Public Library from 10am to 6pm on Tuesday through Friday and 9am to 4pm on Saturdays



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Paper lanterns are released to honor Joana Katrina Vitug's memory on the first year of her death anniversary.

Vitug's family marks one year since her murder

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
The family and loved ones of Joana Katrina Vitug mark her first year death anniversary with a visit to her tomb at the Tanapag Cemetery on Dec. 19.

It's been a year since the gruesome murder of Joana Katrina Vitug inside a law office in Garapan on the morning of Dec. 19, 2014, in the hands of a former boyfriend.

Last Saturday, the family and loved ones of Vitug marked her first year death anniversary with an 8am Mass at the San Antonio Church and then a visit to her tomb at the Tanapag Cemetery.

There, the family released paper lanterns to honor Vitug's memory.

Vitug was shot and killed by Police Officer 1 Christopher S. Santos, who then shot himself in the head inside the Mailman and Kara law offices in Garapan where she worked as a paralegal.

Vitug, 30, and Santos, 24, had one child together; Vitug had three other children. ***(Saipan Tribune)***

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Marpi landfill, transfer station operation hours

The Lower Base Transfer Station and the Marpi Landfill facilities will be closed on Thursday, Dec. 24, 2015, at 11:30am, and on Friday, Dec. 25, 2015, both facilities will close all day in observance of Christmas Day. Regular operations will resume on Saturday, Dec. 26, 2015. ***(PR)***

FEMA releases $1.1 million to GPA

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Delegate Madeleine Z. Bordallo (D-GU) announced yesterday that the Federal Emergency Management Agency has provided the Guam Power Authority with $1,181,440.67 in federal grant assistance. These funds will be used to offset power restoration projects conducted by GPA as a result of Typhoon Dolphin back in May. The federal funds constitute 75% of the total cost of the projects and are authorized by Section 406 of the Stafford Act.

"FEMA continues to provide assistance to our community to fully recover from Typhoon Dolphin. This grant will assist GPA with the power restoration projects they undertook following the typhoon. I appreciate FEMA's commitment to ensure that our island is restored to normal and that our local government has the federal support that it needs to address these issues." ***(PR)***

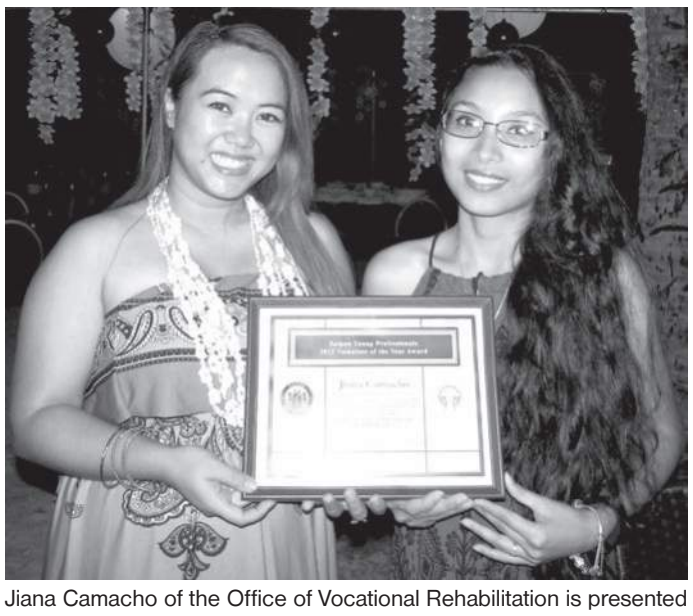
Nominations open for Employer Support Freedom Award

The deadline to submit nominations for the 2016 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award is on Dec. 31, 2015. Presented by the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, a Department of Defense office, the Freedom Award is the nation's highest honor presented to civilian employers for exceptional support of their National Guard and Reserve employees. ESGR encourages Guardsmen, Reservists, or family members acting on their behalf, to submit nominations at www.FreedomAward.mil. The Freedom Award ceremony is held in Washington, D.C., for up to 15 deserving employers each year in August. ***(ESGR)***

Air Force training at FDM

The U.S. Air Force will conduct training at the island of Farallon de Medinilla today, Dec. 23, 2015, from 10am to 4:30pm. The general public, especially fishermen, commercial pilots and marine tour operators are advised to stay clear of the area during the dates and times indicated. The general location of the training on the island of Farallon de Medinilla will be on a 10-nautical mile radius on all quadrants. ***(PR)***

Delta's Chris Concepcion is named SYP of the Year



Jiana Camacho of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation is presented with the distinguished "SYP Volunteer of the Year Award."

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Jeaniffer Cubangbang of the CNMI Public School System is recognized with the "SYP Attendance Award."

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Glen Hunter of CNMI C.O.R.E. is presented with the "SYP Community Leader Award."

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Christopher A. Concepcion, sales account executive for Delta Air Lines, is presented with the 2015 Saipan Young Professional of the Year Award.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Saipan Young Professionals Committee has announced that Christopher A. Concepcion, sales account executive for Delta Air Lines, has been chosen as the recipient of the 2015 Saipan Young Professional of the Year Award.

The announcement was made at the SYP "Hafa Adai" Christmas Party held on Dec. 12 at the Barefoot Bar of the Kanoa Resort Saipan.

"We're pleased to present the first Saipan Young Professional of the Year award recognizing Mr. Concepcion's outstanding leadership and dedication to serving the community both personally and professionally," said SYP chair Mable Ayuyu. "Mr. Concepcion has demonstrated his commitment to truly serving his community."

Concepcion currently serves as a board member of the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. and the Saipan Chamber of Commerce. He is also a member of the Saipan Young Professionals Committee, the Marianas Tourism Educational Council and the Marianas March Against Cancer Organizing Committee.

In 2014, Concepcion was chosen as a member of the Inaugural Class of the Pacific Century Fellows – Marianas Chapter. Within the same year, he was named in *Guam Business Magazine*'s "40 Under 40" annual issue, featuring the top young professionals within the CNMI and Guam. He also actively participates in various volunteer efforts and programs with his employer, Delta Air Lines.

"We congratulate Chris Concepcion on this well-deserved award and thank him for the countless hours of service he commits each year to the community and particularly to our committee," said Ayuyu.

The evening also honored other outstanding SYP members and a community leader. Jiana Camacho of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation received the distinguished "SYP Volunteer of the Year Award" for her consistent dedication to volunteering with organizations including the NMI Chapter of the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army.

Recipients for the SYP special awards include Glen Hunter of CNMI C.O.R.E., for the "SYP Community Leader Award"; Jeaniffer Cubangbang of the CNMI Public School System for the "SYP Attendance Award"; and Tyler Yoshimoto, recipient of the "SYP Education Award." The Committee would like to recognize and thank the award nominees including John Hirsch of the American Red Cross and Emanuel Borja of Hofschneider Engineering.

"We're proud to have an awards ceremony that allows us to highlight and recognize young and vibrant leaders today. This is a way for us to promote a more active network of young professionals to be proactive and to be involved in the growth and development of our islands," said Ayuyu.

She encouraged young professionals on the island to consider joining the Saipan Young Professionals Committee as an avenue of growth and opportunity.

The SYP Christmas Party featured fun games, entertainment, raffle prize drawings and the announcement of the 2015 Saipan Young Professional Awards.

The Committee also teamed up with Karidat Social Services, donating toys for their Christmas toy drive. Their donation will be made to the non-profit organization within this week. "We'd like to extend a thank you to the business community, especially the Saipan Chamber of Commerce member organizations for donating to our event," said Ayuyu.

For more information on the committee, visit their Facebook Page at www.facebook.com/spy96950 or contact the Saipan Chamber of Commerce at 234-7150. ***(SYP)***

Members of the Saipan Young Professionals Committee have their picture taken at the SYP "Hafa Adai" Christmas Party held on Dec. 12 at the Barefoot Bar of the Kanoa Resort Saipan.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Opinion

Hafa Adai!
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EDITORIAL

The weird principles of giftonomics

The following editorial appeared in the Chicago Tribune *on Sunday, Dec. 20:*

The holiday gift shopping season is in full frantic gear now, with millions of Americans seeking just the perfect present for everyone on their list. Or, if not the perfect gift, at least something passable. Or if not something passable, maybe this is the year to give ... money? A donation to plant a tree or feed a child somewhere?

Gift dread—wracking your brain for a great gift idea—is as traditional as Christmas mistletoe or Hanukkah dreidels. Sometimes inspiration delivers. Sometimes you get ... another sweater.

Economists who study the mismatch of Christmas gift exchanges coined a cold term for this: "deadweight loss." Here's what that means: You give your spouse a $100 bracelet. But she doesn't value it at that amount. She'd have preferred a necklace, or maybe a ring. So the gap between what you paid for the gift, and how much the recipient values it, is called the deadweight loss.

In 2009, University of Minnesota economics professor Joel Waldfogel estimated the economic waste of ill-chosen gifts: "Given the $65 billion in U.S. holiday spending per year, that means we get $13 billion less in satisfaction than we would receive if we spent that money the usual way—carefully, on ourselves," he wrote in Slate. "Americans celebrate the holidays with an orgy of value destruction." We pity whoever got Waldfogel as their Secret Santa.

By this reasoning, people should generally give cash or cash equivalents so that receivers know exactly how much the relationship is valued.

Here we tread into treacherous territory. Everyone knows the calculation that comes with a gift: How much should I spend? How much is enough to express my feelings for the recipient? Too much, and you feel foolish; too little and you risk rupturing a relationship.

But let's forget about dollars for a minute.

Think back to all the gifts that you remember. If you're like us, there aren't all that many. Not that you haven't had your share of sweaters, ties, toys, electronic gewgaws and—yes—socks. But the gifts that stick in memory aren't the most expensive, the most elaborate. Who hasn't framed a child's gift of artwork, for instance, to cherish? Wasn't that trip to swim with the beluga whales at the Shedd Aquarium a thrill, even years later? How about that battered pocket watch handed down from your grandfather's grandfather? Doesn't work? Doesn't matter.

We have friends who exchange few gifts because, they argue, they've got everything they need, and if they require something, they buy it themselves. That saves time and trouble at holiday times.

But it robs both potential giver and prospective receiver of the Eureka! moment when the perfect gift idea finally presents itself.

Warning: This doesn't always happen on cue before major holidays. It may not happen at all for several gift-giving occasions—birthdays, anniversaries—in a row. Your friends and family may or may not buy this explanation for a paucity of presents.

But here's the secret: One great gift, even once a year, overshadows a dozen uninspired presents. A study in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology showed how people attach sentimental value to some gifts that outweighs the costs of

See GIFTONOMICS on Next Page

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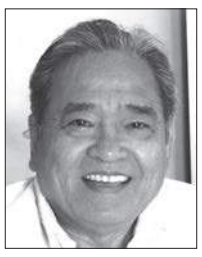
WHAT? A TICKET FOR UNREGISTERED DRONES? BUT THESE ARE REINDEER!!
I DON'T BELIEVE IN REINDEER.

Paskong Pinas

By JAIME VERGARA
Special to the Saipan Tribune



Jaime Vergara previously taught at SVES in the CNMI. A peripatetic pedagogue, he last taught in China but makes Honolulu, Shenyang, and Saipan home. He can be reached at pinoypanda2031@aol.com. All views expressed by the author are his/her own and do not necessarily reflect the opinion and stance of the Saipan Tribune.

I've been using the word Pinoy as a world-wise street-smart x-creature of Philippine-descent who walks the planet as if it was his or hers, but the language is inextricably gender-identified and Pinoy is definitely masculine, as Pinay, an operational term, is feminine.

I am shifting to *Pinas,* of feminine gender form but which is normally rendered with an apostrophe before the "P"; in my case I will skip the apostrophe to designate both genders, either female or male. Pinas also points to geography of origin and I will leave it at that, too.

I used the old metaphor of the City of Lights, gay Paree, a fun-loving city appropriate for the lightness of being, until I noticed that the lights in my neighbors' windows were blinking a good week before Thanksgiving. How did the tradition of blinking lights enter into Pinas' DNA? JP building in Garapan had Santa Claus glitter and my apartment complex' entrance was sporting lit plastic fir trees at the lighted entrance driveway. It turns out that on both places, they showed the Pinas touch on Christmas, the tradition of lighted *parol* (lantern) that grace homes at *Pasko/Påsgua* on island. Two windows across my complex started the flashing glares turning to 12 windows by the end of November.

Ang pasko ay sumapit ...Of course, the predominant Pinas units tended to be lit more than the spattering of Hangul, Nihongo, Zhongguoren, the *haole* and the Chamorros from off island whose members attend nearby NMC. Clearly, Pinas has an edge on the lighted *parol* tradition.

"Big deal," one can be dismissive, but the lights are resplendent and families evidently do not spare the expense on colored bulbs. In the spirit of CUC advising folks to go ahead and purchase their lights as power supply was going to be total by Christmas, it appears that Pinas had taken the dare and the promise seriously. The employees at JP Center and the residents of Finasisu Terraces, predominantly Pinas, assured the place the glitz of lights.

The radio station plays *tannenbaum* and we got northern Europe celebrating Christmas in my backyard. We got the Spanish tradition of lights, of Scandinavian-Nordic origin when the sun goes to sleep a month of the year making the "lights" a necessity at night. The *tannenbaum* is alpine fir tree that stays green and fresh through the cold winter in the snow and so in the dead of winter, light is bright and the tree stays green.

Edelweiss, the fragrant above-the-tree-line Alpine flower, white and green, is a symbol of dedication and compassion, the hopefulness and care-filled-ness of life for those who choose to live it that way. Of course, there are many other options, but Christmas is a religious season of hope, however one slices it (never mind the equity-measured and advantage sought-after gift-giving practices). The *parol* among my neighbors and the green fir Christmas trees at our complex entrance—brightness in normally gloomy and wilted winter of Scandinavia—are signs that life can be lived and celebrated in the tropics all year round. Celebrate!

Other than the military live-fire proposal on Tinian, the dropping of incendiary bombs on Pagan that may be likened to the fate of old decimated Farallon de Medinilla targeted by fly-bys that sent shivers to Chamorro-Carolinian nerves, tremors to the heart of Cinta Kaipat, *et al,* the NMI is living up to what it paid for: as a strategic military location for Uncle Sam's command. That the real estate comes cheap is hardly surprising; that the Pentagon hardliners will rule the islands' future is not even in question.

The lights and the tannenbaum might have originated in Europe, and the song *Edelweiss* popular to the Sound of Music hum, but Pinas appropriated the year-round sunlight and fir evergreen foliage to the tropical island homes in Pea Eye and the CNMI, the *parol* for lights and the *tannenbaum* in the islands' own abundant growth of fire and flame trees.

Marianas dealt with Spain but each party kept its distance until a liberal Cortez set rigid relations free. Micronesia from Palau to the Marshalls did sing the "tannenbaum» for a short while, but the babe in the manger is the revered Santo Niño of popular piety. The season is more than just a religious celebration. As a symbol of hope, it crept into the islands' DNA.

Sleds slide on snow ringing sleigh bells through the cold night in tropical imagination. The images in stores are of Santa and his reindeers, and though many have yet to see snow, they sing of getting reindeers learning how to fly.

It is the light that battle darkness and prevails, and *tannenbaum* that stands out of the cold that makes tropical Saipan's Christmas a veritable symbol of hope.

Maligayang Pasko sa imong tanan, gagayyem! That covers most of Pinas on island save the *Kapampangan* in D'Elegance. *Frohe Weihnachten, Feliz Navidad, Sheng Dan Kuai Le, Sung Tan Chuk Ha, Mele Kalikimaka, Ameseighil ubwutiiwel, Pozdrevlyayu s prazdnikom, Merīkurisumasu,* and *Felis Påsgua.*

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Shifting gears involuntarily

By JOHN DELROSARIO
Special to the Saipan Tribune

John DelRosario Jr. is a former publisher of the Saipan Tribune *and a former secretary of the Department of Public Lands. All views expressed by the author are his/her own and do not necessarily reflect the opinion and stance of the* Saipan Tribune.

The holiday season brings shifts in gear and December does that almost naturally. There's joy and heartfelt felicitations to spread among friends and family.

We close out the receding year thankful for all our blessings bracing to meet the challenges of 2016. We're set to do better from family obligations to our community responsibilities.

The shift brings with it equal amounts of good and bad tidings too. Regardless, no one is immune from life's sometime abrupt and derailing setbacks. We all get a share of it at some point.

For those in their golden years there are nostalgic moments when we reflect upon our life's journey 40-50 years ago. It placed under our belt a wealth of experience, tolerance, patience and wisdom. The friendship and solidarity we've cemented granted us time to revel in nostalgic renewal.

Indeed, we could see around the table the tired and wrinkled faces of our parents and friends though their smiles signal hope that not all is lost. They are still mindful of the fate of our people. Never mind that the wagon and horse have abruptly been dislodged each heading in different directions. We've persevered through mind numbing adversity.

Question: have we contributed sufficiently to guide our sinking canoe amidst a huge fiscal storm at sea and threats of cultural genocide? Do we sleepwalk it once more?

Somewhat troubling though how the educated have somehow shied away from active participation to help the overall wellbeing of our people. Please, don't despair though hopelessness may be a discouraging word. I've been up this road one too many times over the last forty years. I'm still standing and have outlasted a lot of politicians that have sailed into the sunset.

We wonder how our families have done over the same period. There's the shift in the way family does things including the use of modern devices that mutes family conversations. It has slowly pushed culture and tradition to the edge.

Immediately outside our doors are events unfolding that would eventually displace our people. If we evolve into something better, fine. But the path has taken on strange direction riddled with disorientation that challenges the simple minds and conviction of our people.

As I struggle to understand these shifts there pops the issue whether I am the victim of my own slow reaction to change while others have instantly caught up; or is it just the reverse. I have accepted the inevitable imposition of technology on a global basis. I pine though for a slow down on the adaptation of change. We need some thoughtful review so we could all be on the same page.

I'd head to the quiet corners of my mind if only to sift through the maze. I know too that the more mindful bunch have been eyeing the very issues I've discussed and have done due diligence to dissect the consequences of events now unfolding. We need not wait until the eleventh hour to actively and proactively take back what's ours. We must begin today!

Retirement's unfunded liability

We seem to have lost vital navigational tools. As such, we're headed into a huge underwater reef that could render our ship totaled by 2019. I'm talking about the hidden unfunded liability of some $789 million of the retirement fund. This is serious debt. Major reform is in order including finding funds to cover Medicaid costs when we're mandated to absorb every penny.

Four years from now when investment funds are eventually depleted displacing some 3,000 retirees, you wonder what else is there as the fund wrestles hopelessly with the balance of its unfunded liability. I doubt the NMI could pay for it either or the entire 100 percent in pensions due!

Its economic effects would be devastating meaning, a loss of about $70 million from the local economy. Retirees won't be spending for needs without receipt of their pension funds. Definitely, this would drive us into the realm of chaos all over.

Recovery goes through a process. This can't be treated with instant soba mindset. It needs to pan through before we could see if revenue generation is factually revived. Would a federal bailout be possible? It looks grim! We're now wading deeper into economic and financial crises that begin to look too difficult to resolve.

Required infrastructure

Appalling to hear legislators quizzing the dire need for basic infrastructure in the Garapan area where a big project has begun. Shouldn't this issue be addressed at the initial stage of the project to determine its likely adverse impact upon the community? Why embrace a fool's wisdom of advancing to the rear?

Moreover, the northern side of the island is ill equipped with the same infrastructure that would become problematic with the community up there. I'm talking water, power, and sewer. In light of this, do we allow for a large development to proceed or do we delay until we could come up with our share in basic infrastructure emplacement?

While some issues may easily be accepted like jobs for locals basic infrastructure must be addressed and resolved before we're forced into two decades of catch-up jobs. It's to ensure the quality of life doesn't sink into the abyss of hardship because we failed to plan accordingly. Our fond "halo" and "welcome home" to legislators who just woke up to reality!

You can't consistently ignore the benefits of a fully thought-out plan. Must have something concrete and credible lest investors would move to the sidelines to wait out the usual internal indecisions at home. The NMI can't afford the usual sleepwalk syndrome it has treated significant issues.

In praise of journalists who risk all

By TRUDY RUBIN
The Philadelphia Inquirer

Trudy Rubin is a columnist and editorial-board member for the Philadelphia Inquirer*. Readers may write to her at:* Philadelphia Inquirer, *P.O. Box 8263, Philadelphia, Pa. 19101, or by e-mail at trubin@phillynews.com.*

Every year at this time, media organizations publish lists of the number of journalists imprisoned, missing, murdered, or held hostage around the world.

According to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 69 journalists had been killed worldwide in 2015 as of Dec. 7, and there were 199 behind bars on Dec. 1. That doesn't include journalists who disappear or are kidnapped by criminal gangs or jihadis. Reporters Without Borders said this month that 54 professional journalists are currently being held hostage, mainly in Syria, Iraq, or Yemen.

The numbers remind us of the immeasurable bravery of journalists who report from Mideast conflict zones or investigate drug rings in Latin America or corruption in China. As serious U.S. journalism is being eclipsed by digital infotainment, we should pay tribute to journalists who still risk their lives in places most Westerners dare not go.

No one deserves that tribute more than Ahmed Mohamed al-Mousa, a Syrian citizen-journalist who was killed by a masked man in Idlib, Syria, this month.

Mousa was a member of Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently, a group of young Syrians determined to publish online information about the crimes of ISIS in their hometown of Raqqa, the home base of the so-called jihadi caliphate.

There are no normal WiFi or satellite connections in Raqqa, and if there were it would be a death sentence to use them. But somehow these brave young Syrians—most of whom were students, professionals, or businessmen before the war—are finding ways of getting information out.

Last month, a co-founder of the group, Abdelaziz Al-Hamza, made it to New York City to accept CPJ's 2015 International Press Freedom Award on behalf of Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently.

In his acceptance speech, Mousa said: "Maybe we're not professional journalists, maybe we're only 'citizen journalists.' We don't care a lot about labels. We just want to prove ourselves on the ground as a force facing the most brutal regime (of Syrian president Bashar al-) Assad, and the most dangerous organization, ISIS.

"We carry out graffiti campaigns on the walls inside the most dangerous strongholds of ISIS, attempting to prove to the world that we will defeat arms with thoughts."

Mousa escaped Raqqa under death threat. But ISIS kidnapped his father in Raqqa and sent Mousa a video, telling him to stop his journalistic work. He didn't. Then they sent him a video showing them murdering his dad.

I asked Sherif Mansour, the Middle East and North Africa program coordinator for CPJ, what drives a journalist like Mousa to make such huge sacrifices.

"They just want to document what is happening, to tell the world," he said. "No one outside cares about Raqqa because the story is not being told."

Not surprisingly, Syria was the deadliest country for journalists in 2015, with 13 dead. The determination of Syrian citizen-journalists to carry on—despite being hunted by both the Syrian government and ISIS—is almost past understanding. Next most deadly this year were France (where nine journalists were killed in terrorist attacks), Brazil, Bangladesh, Iraq, and Yemen.

As for jailers of journalists, China wins that dubious prize for the second year in a row, with 49 behind bars. In supposedly democratic Egypt (23) and Turkey (14), the numbers of imprisoned journalists nearly doubled over the past year as their elected presidents moved to muzzle dissent.

But Iran, number two on the list with 19 journalists in jail as of Dec. 15, has been on a roll in muzzling the media this year. Hard-liners are trying to prevent media from calling for reforms in the wake of Tehran's nuclear deal with the West—and as parliamentary elections draw near.

One of the most egregious cases involves an American citizen.

I refer to the continued, wholly unjust imprisonment of Washington Post correspondent Jason Rezaian, who marked 500 days of detention in the notorious Evin prison on Dec. 2. This grim milestone surpasses the bleak stats for the U.S. diplomats who were taken hostage in 1979 during the Iranian revolution; they were released after 444 days.

Because Rezaian is an Iranian American, Iran insists it can hold him as one of its own. In a farcical proceeding, he was tried behind closed doors on vague charges of espionage and sentenced last month. But no one knows for how long because his lawyer wasn't even allowed to be present.

Despite hints of his likely release from Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, architect of the nuclear deal, Rezaian remains in Evin. (Unfortunately, Rezaian's release wasn't directly linked to the deal.)

Rezaian (and at least three other Americans being held) are pawns in the rivalry between Iranian reformers and hard-liners, I was told by Ali Vaez, an Iran expert at the International Crisis Group.

"They are being used to make sure better relations (between Tehran and Washington) don't happen," Vaez said.

If that is the intent of Iranian hard-liners, and they continue to hold Rezaian hostage, they may well succeed.

The fate of Rezaian will signal in what direction Iran is heading. And it reminds us of the debt we owe to journalists who still report full time from the world's most difficult spots.

GIFTONOMICS

From Page 10

the gifts and far outweighs the value of presents that they bought themselves during a holiday season. Researchers found that presents people bought for themselves quickly shed their power to bring happiness. That's called "hedonic adaptation." But many gifts did not. They held their value, often because of sentimental value.

The trick is to find those gifts that gather sentimental value.

From our experience, it helps to always be on the alert. Even if that birthday or special holiday is months away. Start thinking about it now. And remember: thought and effort does count. A long investigative effort to track down a favorite childhood recipe for a cheese flaky from a long defunct bakery, for instance, may not have produced the recipe. But it did produce a detective tale of tasty tidbits—emails and phone calls and interviews—entertaining enough to earn the giver at least partial credit for ... trying.

Mercy—what gift that is.

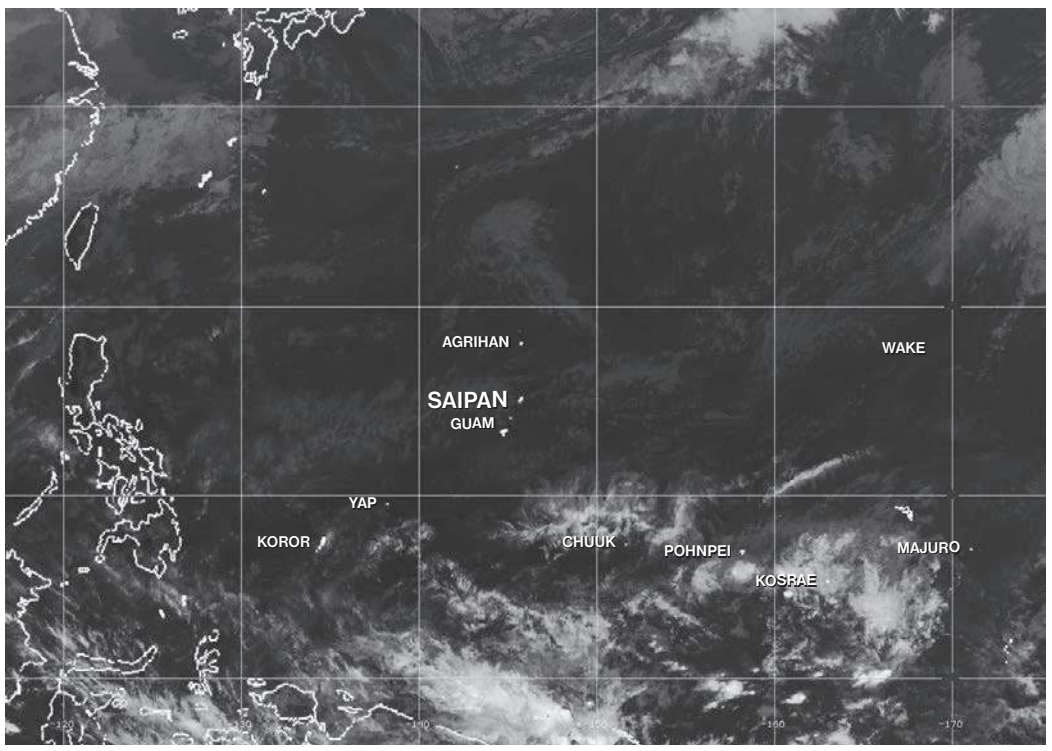
(c)2015 Chicago Tribune

The Weather

5-Day Forecast for Saipan and Tinian

TODAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Partly sunny and breezy with isolated showers. Northeast winds 20 to 25 mph.	Partly cloudy and breezy with isolated showers. Northeast winds 20 to 25 mph.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
▲85º ▼74º	▲87º ▼75º	▲87º ▼76º	▲87º ▼76º	▲87º ▼76º

Yesterday's Satellite Image



PICTURE TIME: 1:00PM, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2015
Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

The leading edge of a weak, diffuse and nearly stationary shear line extends southwestward from 22N170E across Wake Island to near Rota to 12N134E. Scattered to broken cumulus clouds extend 350 miles north of the shear line closer to Wake Island while these conditions spread about 250 miles north of the feature near the Marianas. A weak nearly stationary trough sitting just north of the Marianas along 21N145W and 24N144W is generating an area of broken low clouds within 200 miles to the east. A near equatorial trough runs from 4N179E westward over Kosrae and just south of Pohnpei near 6N158E then extending to the southwest to EQ135E. Isolated thunderstorms are observed near Kosrae and just south of Pohnpei.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: www.prh.noaa.gov/guam/

Micronesia

Guam And Rota	Showers	▲85	▼77
Palau	Mostly Cloudy	▲88	▼78
Yap	Partly Cloudy	▲86	▼77
Chuuk	Partly Cloudy	▲86	▼79
Pohnpei	Mostly Cloudy	▲86	▼78
Kosrae	Thunderstorms	▲84	▼80
Majuro	Mostly Sunny	▲85	▼80

Around the Globe

Auckland	Partly Cloudy	▲77	▼61
Beijing	Mostly Sunny	▲41	▼23
Hong Kong	Mostly Cloudy	▲74	▼68
Honolulu	Partly Cloudy	▲84	▼72
London	Sunny	▲51	▼47
Los Angeles	Showers	▲64	▼50
Manila	Mostly Sunny	▲89	▼72
Melbourne	Sunny	▲86	▼59
Miami	Thundershowers	▲82	▼75
New York	Rain	▲63	▼52
Osaka	Rain	▲57	▼50
Paris	Partly Cloudy	▲55	▼47
Pusan	Showers	▲58	▼41
Rome	Mostly Sunny	▲62	▼44
Salem	Rain	▲45	▼38
San Francisco	Showers	▲60	▼47
Seoul	Partly Cloudy	▲51	▼28
Tokyo	Showers	▲50	▼45
Washington, DC	Rain	▲62	▼53

NMI CRIME STOPPERS
Anonymous tips can now be submitted through the following:
- Call 234-7272 (PARA) on any telephone
- *11 on any IT&E cellular phone
- Log on to the internet at www.nmicrimestoppers.com

Tides

Saipan Harbor

6:35 AM	Today	High Tide:	1.8 Feet
11:45 AM	Today	Low Tide:	1.0 Feet
5:11 PM	Today	High Tide:	2.1 Feet

Sunrise/Sunset

Today	6:39 AM	5:53 PM
Thursday	6:39 AM	5:53 PM
Friday	6:40 AM	5:54 PM
Saturday	6:40 AM	5:54 PM
Sunday	6:41 AM	5:55 PM

Moonrise/Moonset

Today	3:57 PM	4:04 AM
Thursday	4:52 PM	5:03 AM
Friday	5:49 PM	6:02 AM
Saturday	6:45 PM	6:58 AM
Sunday	7:40 PM	7:52 AM

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF DECEMBER 4, 2015

DEPARTURES

SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)

UA2924	4:15am	5:05am	Daily
UA2922	8:40am	9:30am	Daily
UA2921	1:30pm	3:10pm	1, 4, 5, 7 via Rota
UA2920	2:20pm	3:10pm	2, 3, 6
UA2928	6:05pm	6:55pm	Daily
UA2926	9:50pm	10:40pm	Daily

SAIPAN-ROTA (ROP)

UA2921	1:30pm	2:05pm	1, 4, 5, 7

ROTA (ROP)-GUAM (GUM)

UA2921	2:35pm	3:10pm	1, 4, 5, 7

SAIPAN-NARITA (NRT)

DL297	4:20pm	7:10pm	Daily

SAIPAN-SEOUL (ICN)

OZ626	2:10am	6:00am	1
OZ626	2:50am	6:40am	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
OZ628	3:50am	7:40am	Daily
7C3403	4:35am	8:30am	Daily
7C3401	4:30pm	8:25pm	Daily

SAIPAN-BUSAN (PUS)

OZ608	3:10am	6:20am	4, 7

SAIPAN-SHANGHAI (PVG)

3U8648	6:10am	8:40am	1, 4, 5, 7

SAIPAN-BEIJING (PEK)

MU764	1:30am	5:30am	3, 5, 7

SAIPAN-GUANGZHOU (CAN)

3U8646	4:20am	7:30am	2, 6

SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)

OZ626/701	2:10am	11:15am	1 via ICN
OZ626/701	2:50am	11:15am	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 via ICN
UA2924/191	4:15am	9:00am	3, 6 via GUM
UA2924/PR111	4:15am	9:20am	1, 2, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
UA2924/183	4:15am	9:30pm	2, 5 via GUM
UA2924/183	4:15am	9:50pm	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
UA2922/183	8:40am	9:30pm	2, 5 via GUM
UA2922/183	8:40am	9:50pm	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
UA2921/183	1:30pm	9:30pm	5 via Rota-GUM
UA2921/183	1:30pm	9:50pm	1, 4, 7 via Rota-GUM
UA5038/183	2:20pm	9:30pm	2 via GUM
UA5038/183	2:20pm	9:50pm	3, 6 via GUM
UA5072/191	9:50pm	7:20am+1	1, 6 via GUM

SAIPAN-HONG KONG (HKG)

OZ626/721	2:10am	11:50am	1 via ICN
OZ626/721	2:50am	11:50am	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 via ICN
OZ628/721	3:50am	12:50am	Daily via ICN
UA2924/159	4:15am	10:35pm	1, 3, 5, 6 via GUM
UA2922/159	8:40am	10:35pm	1, 3, 5, 6 via GUM
UA2921/159	1:30pm	10:35pm	1, 5 via Rota-GUM
UA2920/159	2:20pm	10:35pm	3, 6 via GUM

ARRIVALS

GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN

UA2923	2:45am	3:35am	Daily
UA2925	7:15am	8:05am	Daily
UA2921	12:10pm	1:00pm	1, 4, 5, 7
UA2920	12:10pm	1:50pm	2, 3, 6 via Rota
UA2927	4:45pm	5:35pm	Daily
UA2929	8:30pm	9:20pm	Daily

GUAM (GUM)-ROTA (ROP)

UA2920	12:10pm	12:45pm	2, 3, 6

ROTA (ROP)-SAIPAN

UA2920	1:15pm	1:50pm	2, 3, 6

NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN

DL298	10:35am	3:10pm	Daily

SEOUL (ICN)-SAIPAN

7C3402	10:10am	3:30pm	Daily
OZ625	7:40pm	1:00am+1	7
OZ625	8:20pm	1:40am+1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
OZ627	9:30pm	2:50am+1	Daily
7C3404	10:10pm	3:30am+1	Daily

BUSAN (PUS)-SAIPAN

OZ607	9:00pm	1:50am+1	3, 6

SHANGHAI (PVG)-SAIPAN

3U8647	10:40pm	5:00am+1	3, 4, 6, 7

BEIJING (PEK)-SAIPAN

MU763	4:30pm	12:30am+1	2, 4, 6

GUANGZHOU (CAN)-SAIPAN

3U8645	7:40pm	3:00am+1	1, 5

MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN

UA190/2929	9:55am	9:20pm	2, 6, 7 via GUM
UA190/2929	10:00am	9:20pm	3 via GUM
OZ702/625	12:30pm	1:00am+1	7 via ICN
OZ702/625	12:30pm	1:40am+1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 via ICN
OZ702/627	12:30pm	2:50am+1	Daily via ICN
PR110/UA2925	10:05pm	8:05am+1	1, 3, 5, 6, 7 via GUM
UA184/2925	10:55pm	8:05am+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
UA184/2921	10:55pm	1:00pm+1	3, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
UA184/2920	10:55pm	1:50pm+1	1 via GUM-Rota
UA184/2927	10:55pm	5:35pm+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
UA184/2929	10:55pm	9:20pm+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
UA184/2925	11:59pm	8:05am+1	2, 5 via GUM
UA184/2920	11:59pm	1:50pm+1	2, 5 via GUM-Rota
UA184/2927	11:59pm	5:35pm+1	2, 5 via GUM
UA184/2929	11:59pm	9:20pm+1	2, 5 via GUM

HONG KONG (HKG)-SAIPAN

OZ722/625	1:15pm	1:00am+1	7 via ICN
OZ722/625	1:15pm	1:40am+1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 via ICN
OZ724/627	2:20pm	2:50am+1	Daily via ICN
UA116/2925	10:55pm	8:05am+1	1, 3, 5, 6 via GUM
UA116/2921	10:55pm	1:00pm+1	3, 6 via GUM
UA116/2920	10:55pm	1:50pm+1	1, 5 via GUM-Rota
UA116/2927	10:55pm	5:35pm+1	1, 3, 5, 6 via GUM
UA116/2929	10:55pm	9:20pm+1	1, 3, 5, 6 via GUM

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); 3U: Sichuan Airlines; MU: China Eastern; UA: United Airlines; DL: Delta Airlines; OZ: Asiana; 7C: Jeju AirETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY
6:30AM	6:45AM	Mon, Tue,Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat
7:30AM	7:45AM	Daily
8:30AM	8:45AM	Daily
9:30AM	9:45AM	Daily
10:30AM	10:45AM	Daily
11:30AM	11:45AM	Daily
12:30NN	12:45NN	Daily
1:30PM	1:45PM	Daily
2:30PM	2:45PM	Daily
3:30PM	3:45PM	Daily
4:30PM	4:45PM	Daily
5:30PM	5:45PM	Daily
6:30PM	6:45PM	Daily

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY
7:00AM	7:15AM	Daily
8:00AM	8:15AM	Daily
9:00AM	9:15AM	Daily
10:00AM	10:15AM	Daily
11:00AM	11:15AM	Daily
12:00NN	12:15NN	Daily
1:00PM	1:15PM	Daily
2:00PM	2:15PM	Daily
3:00PM	3:15PM	Daily
4:00PM	4:15PM	Daily
5:00PM	5:15PM	Daily
6:00PM	6:15PM	Daily

SAIPAN TO ROTA

DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY
7:45AM	8:15AM	Mon, Tues,Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat
4:00PM	4:30PM	Mon, Tues,Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat

ROTA TO SAIPAN

DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY
8:30AM	9:00AM	Mon, Tues,Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat
4:45PM	5:15PM	Mon, Tues,Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat

Business

What 2016 will do to your checkbook: Rent, food, gas, raises

By Sarah Skidmore Sell
AP BUSINESS WRITER

Wondering how you will fare financially in 2016? Below are what experts think next year will hold for financial matters close to home: Raises, rent, gas, food and health.

WILL YOU GET A RAISE NEXT YEAR?

Maybe.

Wage growth has been perhaps the job market's biggest weakness since the recession ended. Pay increases have been both slow and uneven, highly dependent on your field of employment. And for many, it has not been enough to keep pace with the cost of living.

In November, average hourly earnings climbed 2.3 percent from a year earlier, according to the government's most recent report. But that is only about two-thirds the roughly 3.5 percent typically seen in a strong economy.

Many economists are optimistic Americans' pay will start growing faster soon because hiring has been good and layoffs have been low. But that's been the case for a while, and wages haven't taken off yet.

Joseph LaVorgna, chief U.S. economist at Deutsche Bank, is not expecting major gains ahead. He notes that measures that include a broader mix of compensation beyond hourly wages show there's even less growth in pay than it seems.

"I'm not convinced things are going to grow as much as I would like them to," he said.

WILL MY RENT GO UP?

Yes, most likely.

It's been a tough few years for U.S. renters because demand has outpaced supply, causing prices to rise.

Rents increased 4.5 percent in October, 5.3 percent in September and 6.2 percent in August, according to real estate data firm Zillow. The median rental payment nationwide was $1,382 in October, roughly 30 percent of the median U.S. family income and high enough for the government to consider it financially burdensome. Over the past decade, that number of renters spending over this threshold on rent has jumped from 14.8 million to 21.3 million, or 49 percent of all renters.

There are more rent increases anticipated ahead.

"Rents are expected to rise in virtually all major cities in 2016," said Hessam Nadji, senior executive vice president with commercial real estate services firm Marcus & Millichap.

Some small consolation: While rents will still rise, the pace of rent growth will slow modestly from the exceptional levels set in 2015 as new construction creates more housing competition, Nadji says.

WILL GAS PRICES STAY LOW?

Yes, most likely.

Oil prices have plummeted over the last year, a result of high global supplies and weaker demand than expected. U.S. drivers are paying less than $2 a gallon on average for the first time since the Great Recession. Seasonal factors and volatile oil prices will push prices up and down throughout the year, but overall prices are expected to remain low compared with recent years.

The Energy Department forecasts an average of $2.37 a gallon next year, which would be the lowest annual average since 2009.

Tom Kloza, head of energy analysis at the Oil Price Information Service, said drivers should expect lower lows and higher highs at the pump in the year ahead, but he doesn't expect the price of a gallon of gasoline to go over $3 at any time in 2016.

"Nationally we are looking at a year that is very similar to the year we are ending," Kloza said.

WHAT ABOUT FOOD?

New year, same dish.

Food prices should rise at a rate near the historical average, according to the USDA's forecasts.

The United States Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service anticipates the price for food will be up 2 to 3 percent for 2016, same as 2015 and in line with the 20-year historical average of 2.6 percent. That includes food people consume at home and out at restaurants.

Annemarie Kuhns, an economist at the ERS, said that certain food prices were off this year due to unusual events, such as the avian influenza that led to the death of millions of birds and sent egg prices up roughly 15 percent. Looking ahead, she and fellow economists anticipate these prices may level off in 2016—assuming cooperation from Mother Nature.

WILL MY HEALTH INSURANCE COST MORE?

Probably.

People buying their own coverage through the exchanges created by the Affordable Care Act should see premiums go up faster in 2016 than in previous years, said Cynthia Cox, associate director of health reform and private insurance at the Kaiser Family Foundation.

According to Kaiser research, if you do not shop around and let your plan passively renew, the premiums for the lowest silver level plan -the most popular on the exchange—will increase 15 percent on average next year. If you are willing to switch, premium increases are expected to be zero to 1 percent. This is because the exchange is set up to encourage shopping around.

These increases apply only to people who are receiving subsidies to help pay for the insurance. For those who do not, the increase is expected to be 6 percent.

Cox added that shoppers should also update any personal information—such as changes to your family size or income—which can impact what they pay.

"It's very important to go back online and shop every year," Cox said. "This is still an evolving market—there are new insurers coming in and other insurers leaving. The only way to find (the best price) is to go online or navigate through a broker."

Employer-sponsored plans premiums increased about 4 percent this year. And while Kaiser does not forecast employer-sponsored plan price changes, it does not anticipate any unusual hikes in health care costs that tend to push up insurance prices. However, employees may end up paying more out of pocket for deductibles, copayments and other expenses they are responsible for, depending on their employer's plan.

Follow Sarah Skidmore Sell at www.twitter.com/sarahssell . Her work can be found at http://bigstory.ap.org/journalist/sarah-skidmore-sell .

Consumers buying cheaper gifts

NEW YORK (AP)—Cheap is the new chic for holiday gifts.

Jana Montero, who has in the past bought loved ones iPods and tablets for Christmas, has changed her attitude about gift giving: This holiday season, she's grabbing candle sets and serving dishes that cost under $30 to give to family and friends.

Montero, who lives in New York and is saving to buy a home with her husband, said: "We want to make sure we're conscious of what we're spending."

More holiday shoppers are expected to be like Montero this holiday season in the latest twist in a theme that has played out since the recession. For nearly a decade, shoppers have been more cautious and practical about their spending, doing more bargain shopping and hunting for deals. But recently, shoppers have taken that practice a step further.

They're becoming more open to buying gifts that in the past might have been considered downright cheap. So, they're not just looking for big discounts on extravagant, expensive designer and brand name goods; they're starting out with the intention of getting less expensive items that they might not have considered buying as gifts in the past.

The number of people willing to buy gifts during this holiday shopping season for under $10 rose to 4 percent this year from 1 percent last year, according to a survey of 1,000 people by America's Research Group, a firm that researches consumer behavior. Meanwhile, the number of people willing to spend between $26 and $35 fell to 18 percent from 22 percent.

Overall, people are expected to spend modestly more this holiday season. The National Retail Federation predicts holiday spending in November and December will be up 3.7 percent to $630.5 billion this year, slower than the 4.1 percent growth during the same period last year.

The shift in attitude toward cheap is partly rooted in economics, says Jeff Green, a retailing consultant based in Phoenix. Shoppers who vigilantly watched their budgets during the recession continue to feel the pressure of keeping tabs on what they're spending even as the economy improves. "Even with the unemployment rate down, I don't think people feel secure in their jobs," he says.

But it's also rooted in a change in consumer psychology. Some shoppers have become suspicious of retailers who continually slash prices, retail consultant Paco Underhill says. In other words, people are beginning to question whether they're paying too much for the gifts that they're buying, so now they're starting out with the expectation that they'll buy really cheap items.

"One of the deeply confusing elements to the consuming public is: What is the real cost of something?" he says.

For example, Stacy Roberts saw plenty of sales when she visited The Fashion Mall at Keystone in Indianapolis on Saturday, but she wasn't impressed. She said shoppers need to start following the price of something they want to buy for the holidays a few months beforehand, so they can tell if the sales are truly a bargain.

"To me, deals are B.S.," she says.

KaloBios fires embattled pharmaceutical executive Shkreli

TRENTON, N.J. (AP)—In barely 24 hours, Martin Shkreli went from an egotistical pharmaceutical boy wonder running two small drug developers and live-streaming his daily activities to unemployed and facing securities fraud charges that could land him in prison for years.

Shkreli, already reviled by the public for astronomical price gouging on a life-saving drug, was terminated by KaloBios Pharmaceuticals, the company disclosed Monday.

The South San Francisco, California, company said in a statement that it terminated Shkreli as its CEO last Thursday and that he resigned from its board of directors then. That was the same day that Shkreli, a 32-year-old former hedge fund manager, was arrested in New York and charged with securities fraud and conspiracy related to a company he previously ran.

Shkreli was led from his apartment in handcuffs by authorities Thursday morning and later pleaded not guilty and was released on $5 million bail. The charges carry a sentence of up to 20 years in prison if he's convicted. By the time Shkreli made bail, Turing Pharmaceuticals Inc., which he had founded and ran, announced he had resigned as the CEO.

AP

In this Dec. 17, 2015 file photo, Martin Shkreli, the former hedge fund manager under fire for buying a pharmaceutical company and ratcheting up the price of a life-saving drug, is escorted by law enforcement agents in New York after being taken into custody following a securities probe.

It was a surprising reversal, even for an executive dubbed the "most hated man in America" this fall after he jacked up the price of Daraprim from $13.50 to $750 per pill. Daraprim is the only approved drug for a life-threatening parasitic infection that mainly strikes pregnant women, cancer patients and AIDS patients.

Amid mounting criticism from patients, doctors and politicians, Shkreli pledged to lower Daraprim's price, but later reneged and instead offered hospitals a 50 percent discount—still amounting to a 2,500 percent increase. Patients normally take most of the week-long treatment at home, so they still face the 5,000 percent price increase, though Turing is offering financial aid to those who can't afford the drug.

Shkreli has since said that law enforcement targeted him because of the price hike.

Meanwhile, Shkreli's Twitter account was hacked Sunday. Posts including "I am now a god," ''Anyone want free money? Willing to donate hundreds of thousands to charities before I go to prison ..." and numerous unprintable ones accumulated on the page before he regained control and deleted them. Many are still viewable on Twitter under "martin shkreli hacked."

His You Tube account, where he's frequently live-streamed himself working on his home computer, talking to himself and eating, also was hit with posts belittling him and hasn't been active since Sunday.

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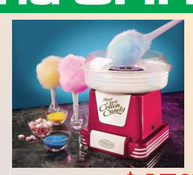

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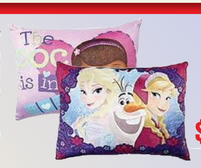

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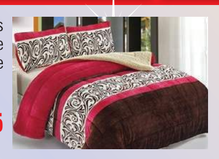

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Nation

Report: No evidence to back up Trump 9/11 claims

JERSEY CITY, N.J. (AP)—An investigation by a leading New Jersey news organization found residents and one former police officer who said they saw small groups celebrating in Jersey City on the day of the Sept. 11 terror attacks, and nothing to back up Donald Trump's claims that he saw thousands of Muslims cheering the fall of the towers in the city across the river from New York.

Retired Jersey City police captain Peter Gallagher told NJ.com that he cleared a group of 20 or 30 people who he said were celebrating on the roof of a four-story apartment building with an unobstructed view of lower Manhattan, while two neighbors told the newspaper they saw a gathering of people celebrating on the street.

"Some men were dancing, some held kids on their shoulders," Gallagher said. "The women were shouting in Arabic and keening in the high-pitched wail of Arabic fashion. They were told to go back to their apartments since a crowd of non-Muslims was gathering on the sidewalk below and we feared for their safety."

Gallagher did not file a police report.

The investigation comes amid presidential contender Trump's insistence that video showed thousands of Muslims in the U.S. cheering the 9/11 attacks. He first made the claim after the Paris attack last month as he pressed the need for greater surveillance, including monitoring certain mosques.

The Associated Press has previously reported that state and local officials said there was no evidence of wide scale celebrations in New Jersey. Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop says police and the city clerk's office have found no evidence to support Trump's claim.

Gov. Chris Christie, a fellow Republican presidential nominee, and former state Attorney General John Farmer Jr. also have said Trump's claims were wrong. Footage of Muslims in Middle Eastern countries cheering news of the attacks were broadcast often on television, but there is no evidence in news archives of mass celebrations by Muslims in Jersey City.

Fulop questioned why Gallagher didn't file a police report about breaking up an alleged celebration in a building that's around the corner from the mosque where Omar Abdel-Rahman, who was convicted for his role in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, preached.

"In the days after 9/11, with heightened awareness and heightened scrutiny, the fact that he didn't document it leads to one of two conclusions: Either he wasn't doing his job, or it never happened," Fulop told NJ.com.

Gallagher said that the people on the roof were cooperative and no report was necessary.

He declined to elaborate on his comments to The Associated Press on Monday.

"I've said what I've said and hope to go on with my retirement," Gallagher said in a Facebook message.

The apartment building in Jersey City was raided by the FBI in the days after Sept. 11 after two residents were arrested at a train station in Fort Worth, Texas, carrying box cutters, thousands of dollars in cash and hair dye. Both men were later cleared of having any connection to the 9/11 attacks.

A retired police officer, Arthur Teeter, who worked in the radio room at the police headquarters, told the newspaper there were numerous calls about reports of an exultant crowd.

"There were enough calls that it was disturbing," he said. "That's the only word I can use."

Ron Knight, 56, said he saw a crowd of 15 to 20 people celebrating in the street. He said it angered him to see they were happy.

Suspect in Vegas crash said she was stressed living in car

LAS VEGAS (AP)—A homeless woman accused of slamming a car carrying her 3-year-old daughter into a crowd of pedestrians on the Las Vegas Strip told authorities she was stressed out after being chased by security guards from parking lots where she had been trying to sleep before the crash, according to a police report obtained Monday.

Lakeisha N. Holloway, 24, resided in Oregon and had been in Las Vegas for about a week in her 1996 Oldsmobile sedan, parking it at garages throughout the city, Clark County Sheriff Joe Lombardo said.

After her arrest, Holloway "described a stressful period today where she was trying to rest/sleep inside her vehicle with her daughter but kept getting run off by security of the properties she stopped at," the police report states.

"She ended up on the Strip, 'a place she did not want to be,'" the report quoted her as saying. "She would not explain why she drove onto the sidewalk but remembered a body bouncing off her windshield, breaking it."

Investigators said Holloway had run out of money and she and her daughter had been living in the car. Police believe she was headed to Dallas to find her daughter's father after they had a falling out.

Holloway is accused of intentionally mowing down people on a busy stretch of Las Vegas Boulevard, killing a woman from Arizona and injuring dozens of others on Sunday night.

After the crash, she parked at a casino a few blocks away, told a parking attendant that she had run down people and asked the valet to call 911, Lombardo said. Her daughter, who was in the backseat, was not hurt.

AP

Police and emergency crews respond to the scene of a car accident along Las Vegas Boulevard, Sunday, Dec. 20, 2015, in Las Vegas.

The sheriff said Holloway was stoic when police arrived, showed no resistance and spoke coherently about what happened. He declined to elaborate on what she said.

"She didn't appear to be distressed due to her actions. That's the best way I can describe it," Lombardo said.

Authorities declined to comment on a potential motive and said they were struggling to piece together Holloway's background.

She had changed her name to Paris Paradise Morton in October, according to Oregon court records.

Several years ago, Holloway, a graduate of an alternative high school, received an award for overcoming adversity from the nonprofit Portland Opportunities Industrial Center.

In 2012, she told The Skanner, a newspaper that covers Portland's African-American community, that she was homeless during her freshman year in high school.

Holloway's cousin, Lashay Hardaway, told The Oregonian that Holloway worked hard to provide for her daughter.

The crash happened in front of the Paris and Planet Hollywood casino-hotels and across from dancing water fountains of the Bellagio hotel-casino. Droves of visitors to the stretch walk from one casino to another.

Car plows into pedestrians on Las Vegas strip
A woman intentionally swerved her car onto a busy sidewalk in front of the Paris Hotel & Casino and struck pedestrians, killing one and injuring 30.
DETAIL AREA
Las Vegas
15
95
515
215
10 miles
10 km
Flamingo Rd.
Las Vegas Blvd.
1 Paris Hotel & Casino
2 Bellagio Hotel & Casino
3 Planet Hollywood Las Vegas Resort & Casino
Source: AP, Google
Graphic: Staff, Tribine News Service

Kansas is 5th state where lottery prizes may have been fixed

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP)—The former security chief for a national group that operates state lotteries personally bought two prize-winning tickets in Kansas worth $44,000, investigators said Monday, bringing to five the number of states where he may have fixed games to enrich himself and associates.

Investigators recently linked the winning 2010 Kansas tickets to Eddie Tipton, former security director of the Multi-State Lottery Association, Iowa assistant attorney general Rob Sand disclosed in court documents. The evidence will show that Tipton associates who claimed the prizes returned half of the money in cash directly to him in early 2011, he wrote.

Tipton allegedly purchased two winning tickets to the "2by2" game at separate locations while traveling through Kansas on business in December 2010, the Kansas Lottery said. Each was worth $22,000, the prize for any player with the day's winning numbers, and were allegedly passed on from Tipton to individuals from Iowa and Texas who claimed them, the lottery's statement said.

In his job at the association managing lotteries for 37 states and territories, Tipton managed random number generators that pick winning numbers for some national games such as Hot Lotto and games played in individual lotteries.

Kansas Lottery officials said they were asked to look into the 2010 tickets by Iowa investigators earlier this month. Any alleged fixing happened at the association headquarters in Urbandale, Iowa, where "2by2" is administered and drawn, they said.

"The Kansas Lottery had no way of knowing that Mr. Tipton was purchasing these tickets, nor that any manipulations of the (random number generator) in Iowa might have occurred," Kansas Lottery executive director Terry Presta said.

The Kansas Attorney General's Office has launched a criminal investigation.

As a lottery vendor, Tipton was barred from playing the lottery.

Prosecutors believe that Tipton, 52, used his access to the machines to surreptitiously install software programs that let him know the winning numbers in advance before disappearing without a trace. They say he worked with associates such as his brother Tommy Tipton—a Texas judge—and Texas businessman Robert Rhodes to play those numbers and collect prizes dating back to 2005.

Earlier this year, a jury convicted Tipton of fraud for fixing a $16.5 million Hot Lotto jackpot dating back to 2010. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison but is free while he appeals.

After fixing the winning combination, Tipton went to a gas station near the lottery association to buy those numbers and then passed the winning ticket to Rhodes, who unsuccessfully tried to collect the prize with associates, prosecutors say. Rhodes is fighting extradition back to Iowa to face charges in the case.

Since Tipton's conviction, Iowa prosecutors have charged Tipton with ongoing criminal conduct and money laundering for allegedly fixing jackpots valued at $8 million in Colorado, Wisconsin and Oklahoma. The Kansas jackpots were added to the charges Monday.

Tipton's attorney, Dean Stowers, laughed out loud when told of the latest allegations against his client. He repeated his contention that there is no evidence that Tipton tampered with the computers, and argued that any charges related to old jackpots should be barred by the three-year statute of limitations. Sand is fighting Tipton's motion to dismiss the case on that ground, saying the additional jackpots were only recently discovered.

Stowers said the new information was a publicity stunt to bring more attention to the case, which is set for trial next month but could be delayed.

"If you look at what they are claiming they have found after the first trial, you would think these investigators must be completely incompetent," he said.

Asia

US troops killed near Bagram, Taliban insurgency intensifies

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)—A suicide attacker rammed an explosives-laden motorcycle into a joint NATO-Afghan patrol Monday, killing six American troops in the deadliest attack on international forces since August. Two U.S. troops and an Afghan were wounded.

The attack happened as Taliban fighters overran a strategic district in southern Helmand province, the scene of some of the deadliest fighting between the Taliban and international combat forces prior to the 2014 withdrawal, adding weight to Pentagon predictions that the insurgency is gaining strength.

The soldiers were targeted as they moved through a village near Bagram Airfield, the largest U.S. military facility in Afghanistan, NATO and Afghan officials said. The Taliban claimed responsibility.

A U.S. official confirmed that six American troops were killed and two wounded. An Afghan was also wounded. The official was not authorized to discuss the incident publicly so spoke on condition of anonymity.

"Our heartfelt sympathies go out to the families and friends of those affected in this tragic incident, especially during this holiday season," U.S. Army Brig. Gen. William Shoffner, head of public affairs at NATO's Resolute Support base in the Afghan capital Kabul, said in a statement.

In Washington, White House press secretary Josh Earnest said the nation's thoughts and prayers are with the victims, their families and their loved ones, and that the U.S. will continue to work jointly with Afghans to promote peace and stability in their country.

Secretary of Defense Ash Carter in statement called the attack "a painful reminder of the dangers our troops face every day in Afghanistan."

It was the deadliest attack on foreign troops in four months. On Aug. 22, three American contractors with the RS base were killed in a suicide attack in Kabul. On Aug. 7 and 8, Kabul was the scene of three insurgent attacks within 24 hours that left at least 35 people dead. One of the attacks, on a U.S. special operations forces base outside Kabul, killed one U.S soldier and eight Afghan civilian contractors.

In the year since the international drawdown, the Taliban insurgency has intensified. Although the combat mission ended last year, around 9,800 U.S. troops and almost 4,000 NATO forces remain in Afghanistan. They have a mandate to "train, assist and advise" their Afghan counterparts, who are now effectively fighting a battle-hardened Taliban alone.

Monday's attack came as Taliban fighters and government forces battled for control of a strategic district in the southern province of Helmand after it was overrun by insurgents, delivering a serious blow to the government's thinly spread and exhausted forces.

Mohammad Jan Rasulyar, Helmand's deputy governor, said insurgents took control of Sangin district late Sunday.

Rasulyar had taken the unusual step of alerting Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to the dire security situation and requesting urgent reinforcements through an open letter posted on Facebook on Sunday, saying that he had not been able to make contact through other means.

"We had to take to social media to reach you as Helmand is falling into the hands of the enemy and it requires your immediate attention," Rasulyar wrote in his Facebook post to Ghani.

Bangladesh moves toward murder trial in Rana Plaza collapse

NEW DELHI (AP)—A court in Bangladesh's capital accepted murder charges Monday against 41 people including the owner of the Rana Plaza building that collapsed in 2013 and highlighted grim conditions in the country's garment industry.

More than 1,100 people, mostly garment factory workers, died when the illegally built complex collapsed in Bangladesh's worst industrial disaster.

The court of Senior Judicial Magistrate Md Al-Amin decided to go ahead with the trial after accepting the murder charges filed by police in June. Investigators initially had said the accused would be charged with culpable homicide, but they shifted to the more severe charges after the investigation found that building owner Sohel Rana, his staff and the management of the five garment factories had forced workers to enter the building just before it collapsed even though the workers feared doing so because major cracks had developed in the structure a day earlier.

The maximum penalty for someone convicted of murder is a death sentence, while the maximum punishment for culpable homicide is seven years in jail.

The police report called the deaths a "mass killing." About 2,500 people were injured in the disaster.

Rana and the owners of the five garment factories are among the 41 defendants accused of murder. While Rana is in jail and 16 others are on bail, the magistrate issued arrest warrants against 24 others, said police prosecution wing officer Mohammad Asaduzzaman.

He said the police would take steps to arrest them. The court told police stations to submit updates on which arrests have been made when the court next hears the case on Jan. 27.

In a separate case, the accused also facing charges of violating safety rules in building Rana Plaza. The original five-story building was meant for office space and retail stores, but more floors were added illegally and transformed into factories.

The extremely low wages in Bangladesh led global brands and retailers to choose its garment industry over factories in China and other developing countries.

The building collapse triggered an uproar for reforms in a sector that helps the country earn about $25 billion a year from exports, mainly to the U.S. and Europe.

ASIAN BRIEFS

Chinese lawyer gets suspended sentence in online speech case

BEIJING (AP)—A prominent Chinese lawyer is expected to be freed after a Beijing court on Tuesday gave him a suspended jail sentence after finding him guilty in a case involving online comments critical of the ruling Communist Party. The court said Pu Zhiqiang was guilty of provoking troubles and inciting ethnic hatred, and sentenced him to three years in prison but also announced that the sentence will be suspended for three years. The sentence came as good news to Pu's supporters, who believe the case has been politically driven to punish the outspoken lawyer who has become a leading figure among China's rights defense lawyers. Pu was active in defending free speech and represented artist Ai Weiwei in a tax evasion case that Ai's supporters said was politically motivated.

Indonesia: Plot foiled to kill officials, Shiite followers

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP)—Indonesian police said Monday they have foiled a plot to kill government officials, law enforcement officers and others by suspected Muslim militants arrested over the weekend. Security was raised at airports, the presidential palace, foreign embassies and shopping malls, and the government said it will deploy more than 150,000 personnel to safeguard public places and churches across the country. Information from the U.S., Australia and Singapore helped Indonesian police discover that the attacks were planned for the year-end holiday season, national police chief Gen. Badrodin Haiti said. Anti-terror police arrested nine men over the weekend in five cities on Indonesia's main island of Java.

14 jailed for deadly scaffold collapse at Beijing school

BEIJING (AP)—Fourteen construction managers were sentenced Monday to prison terms of three to six years for a deadly scaffolding collapse at one of Beijing's most prestigious schools, a court said. The accident in December last year killed 10 construction workers and injured four others at Tsinghua University High School in the city's northwest. The victims had been building a gymnasium at the school, which is affiliated with one of China's top universities. A court in Beijing's Haidian district said in an online statement that the 14 bosses instructed workers not to lay steel bars needed to reinforce the concrete structure, which led to its collapse. They also failed to ensure safety protocols were followed on site, it said.

First body recovered from China landslide, 81 still missing

People watch rescuers using machinery to search for potential survivors following a landslide in Shenzhen, in south China's Guangdong province, Monday, Dec. 21, 2015. AP

SHENZHEN, China (AP)—Rescuers pulled one body from the debris Tuesday and said 81 people were still missing two days after a man-made mountain of excavated soil and construction waste crashed into an industrial park China's manufacturing center of Shenzhen.

The official Xinhua News Agency said rescuers retrieved one body in the early hours of Tuesday. It's the first reported death from the disaster.

The official China News Service said the number of the missing people went down to 81, from previous day's 85, but did not explain how.

Authorities said the landslide buried or damaged 33 buildings in the industrial park in Shenzhen, a city near Hong Kong that makes products ranging from cellphones to cars that are sold around the world.

Residents blamed the government while officials cited human error, with one ministry saying, "The pile was too big, the pile was too steep."

The landslide Sunday covered an area of 380,000 square meters (450,000 square yards) with silt 10 meters (33 feet) deep, authorities said. At least

16 people were hospitalized, including children, Xinhua said.

The Shenzhen government said seven trapped people had been rescued.

The landslide is the fourth major disaster to strike China in a year following a deadly New Year's Eve stampede in Shanghai, the capsizing of a cruise ship in the Yangtze River and a massive explosion at a chemicals warehouse in Tianjin on the coast near Beijing.

Human error has been suspected or confirmed in all three previous disasters, pointing to a lack of regulatory oversight and an often callous attitude toward safety in China despite the threat of harsh penalties.

In Sunday's landslide, the Ministry of Land and Resources said a steep man-made mountain of dirt, cement chunks and other construction waste had been piled up against a 100-meter (330-foot) -high hill over the past two years.

Heavy rains in the region saturated the soil, making it heavy and unstable, and ultimately causing it to collapse with massive force.

"The pile was too big, the pile was too steep, leading to instability and collapse," the ministry said, adding that the original, natural hill remained intact.

Some residents blamed government negligence.

"If the government had taken proper measures in the first place, we would not have had this problem," said Chen Chengli.

Chen's neighbor, Yi Jimin, said the disaster wasn't an act of nature.

World

German steps up deportation of failed asylum-seekers

BAMBERG, Germany (AP)—Faced with an unprecedented influx of refugees and growing anxiety among voters, German authorities have stepped up the deportation of failed asylum-seekers.

New figures show that the number of deportations almost doubled this year from 2014. By the end of November, authorities had deported 18,363 people whose asylum request had been rejected, compared to 10,884 in all of last year.

"(The increase) can be explained on the one hand simply by the increasing number of people who are getting negative (asylum) decisions," Interior Ministry spokesman Johannes Dimroth said Monday.

But the trend is also affected "by the states' increasing willingness to carry out these procedures," he said.

The task of handling asylum requests falls to Germany's 16 states and some have been more rigorous in applying the law than others.

Bavaria, the state that most asylum-seekers first set foot in, more than trebled its deportations to 3,643 in the first 11 months of 2015 from 1,007 last year. The conservative government there has been particularly forceful in pushing to limit the number of refugees coming to Germany - estimated at about one million this year - and speed up deportations of those already in the country.

Earlier this year, Bavaria opened a special center for people unlikely to get asylum. Situated on a former U.S. Army barracks in Bamberg, 50 kilometers (31 miles) north of Nuremberg, the Arrival and Return Facility II currently houses about 850 people.

Almost all are from western Balkan nations, chiefly Albania, followed by Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia and Macedonia.

Germany considers them to be safe countries where individuals are unlikely to face the kind of persecution that would warrant asylum. Some were sent to the center straight from the border, others have been in Germany for more than a year. Most said economic hardship made them travel to Germany.

"In Serbia there*s no work," said Elvis Asani, a Roma from Serbia who is being sent back with his wife and children. "So we thought we go to Germany and work a little bit."

"I go back, but we have no home," Asani said when asked what he would do in Serbia. "Where shall we go with three kids?"

Since the center was opened in mid-September, the 15 staff processing asylum requests haven't issued a single permanent residency permit, officials said. Meanwhile, 463 people were deported voluntarily and 170 were forcibly deported. Decisions are made within five to ten days.

"We don't want to paint a discouraging picture, we want to paint a realistic picture," Stefan Krug, an official with the regional government of Upper Franconia, said Monday.

"The mood ahead of Christmas is obviously a bit depressed," he added. "But all in all it's peaceful."

Interior Ministry spokesman Dimroth said, unlike in previous years, none of Germany's states have suspended deportations for the winter - and says federal authorities also see "no place for a halt to deportations."

Authorities are planning to increase the Bamberg center's capacity to 1,500 by the end of December, and to 4,500 by the end of March.

Outraged Colombians look for blame in Miss Universe mix-up

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP)—Colombians celebrated for a little more than two minutes what appeared to be an unprecedented feat for this beauty pageant-obsessed South American nation: back-to-back Miss Universe titles.

From President Juan Manuel Santos to Miss Colombia's relatives in the Caribbean port city of Barranquilla, millions of Colombians who tuned in for Sunday's pageant screamed joyously when it was announced that Ariadna Gutierrez Arevalo had won this year's crown.

But the celebrating turned to shouts of fraud seconds later as host Steve Harvey announced on live television from Las Vegas that he had mistakenly read from the cue card. The contestant from the Philippines was the new Miss Universe, not Miss Colombia.

"They took away her crown," and "the shortest reign in history" was the sentiment expressed almost universally on Twitter, where the hashtag "Respect the Crown" was the country's top trending topic.

"The entire country, and our family, was overcome with emotion," Alvaro Arevalo, the Colombian runner-up's cousin, told Blu Radio in an interview Monday. "The truth is we're a little shocked."

The sudden reversal even caught by the president by surprise, forcing him to reverse his initial celebratory tweet.

AP

Former Miss Universe Paulina Vega, right, crowns Miss Colombia Ariadna Gutierrez, left, at the Miss Universe pageant Sunday, Dec. 20, 2015, in Las Vegas.

"I was watching Miss Universe with my family. We started a huge celebration when they said Colombia had won the Miss Universe title for the second straight year," Santos told Radio Nacional on Monday.

"They put the crown on her head. The photos are there to prove it. To me, as a Colombian, she is still Miss Universe," he said.

Colombians are obsessed with beauty and pageants are a major draw across social classes. But unlike neighboring Venezuela, which has won seven Miss Universe titles, Colombians are accustomed to falling short of the crown, with five runner-up appearances since 1992 including Sunday's.

Before last year's crowning of Paulina Vega, only one other Colombian had won the Miss Universe title, in 1958.

In the aftermath of Sunday's shocking finale, Colombians were at a loss to explain the mistake. Newscasts devoted almost 20 minutes to dissecting every detail of the pageant's confusing end—from the tweets by a member of the jury celebrating Gutierrez's win to a front-row audience member's alleged slipping of a cue card to Harvey—as reporters looked for clues of what many Colombians believe was a scripted ending to rob their country of its rightful crown and produce higher TV ratings.

Some journalists blamed Donald Trump, saying they could find no financial record confirming that he had indeed sold the rights to the pageant as he said he did in September.

Many Colombians were outraged months ago when Trump on the campaign trail accused Mexico of sending rapists and drug traffickers to the U.S. On Sunday, some said they believed the Republican presidential candidate was somehow still pulling the strings to prevent another Latina from being crowned.

Ex-French policeman freed in Air France fake bomb search

PARIS (AP)—A retired French police officer traveling on Air France was freed Monday after nearly 12 hours of questioning about a fake bomb hidden in a lavatory that forced his Paris-bound flight to make an emergency landing in Kenya, a judicial official said.

The hoax was the fourth against Air France in recent weeks. It came amid heightened concerns about extremist violence in many countries, and passenger jitters around the holidays.

An official in the prosecutor's office in Bobigny, outside Paris. said that the former police officer in his late 50s was once a member of the elite emergency response unit RAID and hailed from the French Indian Ocean island of Reunion. The official wasn't authorized to identify himself when speaking about an ongoing probe.

The man, who wasn't identified by name, had been taken in for questioning upon arrival Monday at Charles de Gaulle Airport.

He could eventually be summoned for a second period of questioning, but further investigation is needed, said the official in the prosecutor's office, adding, "He's not completely out of the woods."

Kenyan Interior Minister Joseph Nkaissery said the man was among six passengers questioned Sunday in Kenya. Nkaissery said Kenya alerted French authorities about the suspected involvement of this man and a traveling companion in placing the fake bomb in the bathroom. He said sniffer dogs traced the package back to their seats and the bathroom.

The arrest is part of an investigation prompted by a legal complaint filed by Air France on Monday for reckless endangerment. The lawsuit doesn't name a perpetrator but leaves it to investigators to determine who might be prosecuted, and allows Air France to seek damages in an eventual trial.

France has been in a state of emergency since Islamic extremist attacks Nov. 13 in Paris killed 130 people and left hundreds wounded. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for those attacks and for downing a plane Oct. 31 carrying Russian tourists out of Egypt, killing all 224 people on board.

On Sunday, Air France Flight 463 from the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius to Paris made an emergency landing in Mombasa, Kenya, after a bomb was reported aboard. All 459 passengers and 14 crew members on the Boeing 777 were safely evacuated down airplane emergency slides.

Authorities later discovered a fake explosive, rigged with cardboard, sheets of paper and a household timer, and declared it a hoax. Air France CEO Frederic Gagey said the homemade apparatus was apparently placed in a lavatory cabinet during the flight.

Overwhelmed with relief, the passengers arrived safely in Paris on Monday, some crying as they embraced loved ones.

"We thought we were going to die. Because of the speed of the airplane going down, we thought we would crash in the sea," said passenger Marine Gorlier of the French town of Melun after landing at Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport.

"I really admired the crew, because they thought it was a real bomb and they remained very serene," said Antoine Dupont of the northern city of Lille. "One of my grandchildren said: 'The slide was super!'"

Burkina Faso: Int'l arrest warrant out for ex-leader Compaore

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso (AP)—Burkina Faso's military court has issued an international arrest warrant for former President Blaise Compaore for the assassination of the country's ex-revolutionary leader Thomas Sankara, the tribunal director said Monday.

Sankara and 12 of his supporters were killed during a 1987 bloody coup that brought Compaore to power. An investigation into Sankara's death was reopened after a popular uprising forced Compaore from office in October 2014 after a 27-year rule. Compaore has denied involvement in Sankara's killing and now lives in exile in neighboring Ivory Coast.

Remains believed to be those of Sankara were exhumed earlier this year from a cemetery on the edge of the capital, Ouagadougou, and are being examined.

Sankara's family's lawyer, Stanislas Benewende Sankara, who isn't related, said Monday "The state of the remains didn't allow the laboratory to certify any DNA results."

Military tribunal director Col. Sita Sangare confirmed the arrest warrant for Compaore on charges of assassination, body concealment and assault.

Compaore's ally, Gen. Gilbert Diendere, had been charged early in December for complicity in Sankara's killing. Diendere is already in jail, arrested after taking power for a week during a short-lived coup by the presidential guard in September that overthrew the country's transitional government.

The presidential guard, loyal to Compaore, has been disbanded. Several members have also been arrested for Sankara's killing.

"I am glad with the step forward made in the case," said Mousbila Sankara, a cousin of the late leader. "(But) I know it will be difficult to have the Ivorians agree to arrest Compaore and send him back home."

Ivory Coast's government didn't immediately reply to requests for comment.

Burkina Faso held delayed national elections Nov. 29 that saw Roch Marc Christian Kabore become the country's second elected civilian president since independence from France in 1960.

Good Housekeeping

Be prepared for overnight holiday guests

By STEPHANIE FIGY
ANGIE'S LIST

Entertaining company can be full of the unexpected. Your niece became a vegetarian. Scented laundry detergent irritates your mom's skin. Since when? You can minimize stress and make your holiday guests feel more at home with some simple planning.

Before donning the holiday host hat, use this checklist to get your house in tiptop shape.

Clean the house.

If you don't have time for a deep clean, focus on the areas visitors will see and use. If no one has used the guest room since last year, there's a chance a thick layer of dust has settled on surfaces.

Light it up.

Check for burnt out bulbs, especially on the home's exterior. Consider some night-lights or touch-lights in the hallway. Sure, you can navigate your home in total darkness, but your guests can't.

Make it welcoming.

Throw out the welcome mat. Place a coatrack near the door or make sure there's room in a nearby closet.

Check the guest bedroom.

Does the bedding need to be spruced? Alarm clock need to be set to the right time? Putting a fabric softener sheet in the pillowcases helps freshen them up quickly before company arrives.

Put extra blankets at the foot of the bed. Consider leaving some towels on the bed so your guests don't have to search for them.

Check the guest bathroom.

Stock up on toiletries. If you usually keep the toilet paper in a cabinet, consider filling a basket with a few rolls.

Stack towels and washcloths somewhere visible. Place a basket on the countertop for your guests' bathroom supplies.

Anticipate needs.

Ask your guests if they have any dietary restrictions so you can be sure to buy goodies suitable for everyone.

Satiate caffeine cravings.

There are few things worse than being the first person awake at someone's home and not knowing where they keep the coffee. Create a coffee station with everything your guests will need: filters, grounds or beans, mugs, spoons and sugar.

Leave towels in plain sight for your guests. THINKSTOCK/TNS

If you can set your machine on a timer, program it to make a fresh pot early in the morning, or at least get it to the point where all your company has to do is press start.

Provide reading material.

Place a variety of books and magazines on the guest room nightstand.

Create a to-do list.

Make a list of interesting sights, restaurants, bars and coffee shops, so your guests can get the local experience.

Don't forget to provide a key and the alarm code if your visitors will be venturing off on their own.

Perform final touches.

This is your opportunity to make things pretty. Pull out the decorations. Cut some fresh flowers to place in vases. Leave snacks or mints on the end table.

Don't forget the grand tour.

Take this time to show the guests the coffee station, supplies in the bathroom, and where you keep your dishes and snacks. These steps will ensure your guests feel comfortable in your home.

Stephanie Figy is a reporter at Angie's List, a trusted provider of local consumer reviews and an online marketplace of services from top-rated providers.

Go pro on your interior design

By LAURA PEARSON
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Have goals to improve the look and feel of your living space? Home projects you talk about constantly but have yet to act upon? "One day we'll do something about the dining room ... " "Someday I'll make over the kitchen.... "

Turning #goals into reality might require calling in the pros. Savvy startup Homepolish makes enlisting interior design help easier than ever. The company enables you to book a designer online for decently priced, by-the-hour services. It's basically the GrubHub of home (or office) decorating.

How it works: Whether you're planning an ambitious renovation or simple space refresh, you'll meet with a Homepolish designer for an initial one-hour consultation in your home or via video chat ($50 for a junior designer, $80 for a senior designer). If you decide to move ahead with the project, you'll buy time by the hour ($100/hour for a junior; $130/hour for a senior) to bring the plans to life, whether that's choosing paint colors, sourcing artwork for the walls or rehabbing entire rooms.

Need inspiration? Browse Homepolish's online magazine, which features a huge variety of house tours, including Homepolish designers' own spaces.

For Homepolish designer Guinevere Johnson, that variety is what makes the job so fun. "Design should be as flexible as the people it caters to," she says.

The fall 2015 design trend to look out for, says Johnson: mixed metals.

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

Keeping nuts fresh

Have nuts leftover from holiday entertaining? Don't just stick them in the back of a cupboard. Because nuts contain a high percentage of oil, they can become rancid. You can store opened containers at room temperature for up to a month. But after that, place nuts in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to six months or in the freezer for up to a year.

To freshen any type of nuts before you eat (or cook with) them, toast on a baking sheet in a 350 F oven for 10 minutes, or place nuts in a small bowl and microwave on High for 1 to 1 1/2 minutes. ***(Hearst Communications, Inc.)***

Dorothy Draper meets Palm Beach Regency in this 1895 mansion

By PATRICIA SHERIDAN
PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

The dining area leads into the living room in Dalzell and Barbara Tucker's second-floor condo in Lawrenceville. BILL WADE/PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE/TNS

PITTSBURGH—Gritty outside but glorious inside, this house in the city's Lawrenceville neighborhood is exactly what Barbara and Dalzell Tucker wanted.

From the street, it looks like any other big house built in Pittsburgh during the industrial boom of the late 1800s. But like the blue collar-turned-hipster neighborhood they now call home, it's so much more than what you see at a glance.

The couple thought they wanted to live in another neighborhood until they saw this house's high ceilings, deep moldings, five fireplaces and large rooms where their Chihuahua, Giselle, could almost get lost.

Five years ago, a developer converted the house into two units, banking on a quick flip in Pittsburgh's hottest real estate market. The second-floor unit really got the couple's attention, with 12-foot ceilings and an open-concept living and dining area. On the floor above it are two bedrooms and two bathrooms.

"The age of the house—1895—and the original hardwood floors were very enticing and there was a lovely porch for Giselle as well," Barbara Tucker says.

Gutted to the studs then, its interior is now Dorothy Draper-meets-Palm Beach Regency—and it works. (Draper revolutionized home design at the turn of the century.) The foyer is wallpapered in bold green and white stripes designed by Carleton Varney, president of Dorothy Draper & Co.

"I have always loved Dorothy Draper—the chintz, cabbage rose, stripes, bright colors. I think it must be from my childhood visits to The Greenbrier in West Virginia, where I have such good memories," she says.

It took nearly a year to put together the look after much shopping in Palm Beach, online and at local antique stores. At one vintage store she found a 1960s server, breakfront and dining room table.

"They were old Drexel Heritage pieces that had aged to a yellowed off-white. I had them painted high-gloss black with gold accents," she says.

The Draper influence is evident in the Brazilliance wallpaper Barbara used around tall windows at the far wall of the living room. It's also used in the powder room tucked under the stairs leading to the bedrooms. Dalzell Tucker loves the oversized banana leaf pattern and ceiling painted ocean blue.

"Being born in Bermuda, he is partial to the island colors," his wife says. "He left the decorating up to me, and he is very happy."

Dalzell works in Bermuda, St. Barts and Pittsburgh. She travels quite a bit for her job as director of individual giving and the travel program at the Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh.

Their journeys inspired a collection of interesting memorabilia, including a pitcher from Venice, a fez from Morocco, a music box from Russia, a kimono from Kyoto and much more. Smaller items are kept in a pagoda display case at the top of the stairs.

"I don't really change the decor because of my travels, although I would love to add a Moroccan room or a Parisian boudoir," she says.

In the kitchen is a larger pagoda display case that holds service pieces, place settings and glasses. The large island is topped with honed Carrara marble perfect for rolling out pastry dough. Off the kitchen is a man cave that Dalzell uses as an office and to watch television. It has yet to be touched by Barbara's aesthetic. In time, it may be transformed into a romantic Berber tent.

Barbara hunted up and down the Dixie Highway in Florida for the perfect pieces to finish the living and dining areas. Everywhere your eye rests there is something attractive or interesting.

The palm tree lamps came from the Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach. Two white greyhound statues sit atop a breakfront. A heavy faux bamboo bookshelf and small X-based ottomans were purchased when Saks Fifth Avenue pulled out of Pittsburgh. Barbara painted them herself and had them reupholstered.

A red Tibetan prayer altar from a local oriental rug dealer acts as a sofa table. A large antique birdcage that resembles a townhouse holds an ornamental bird. She found it at a shop in West Palm Beach.

Her late father's piano sits in a nook near large Chinese lacquered screens from a local antiques store. In another corner is a standing bar topped with a silver trophy cup that her father earned for his business prowess in 1962.

"It's all about mixing the faux with the real, the new with the old," she says.

Life & Style

Miss Universe show, host apologize for crowning wrong woman

NEW YORK (AP)—The Miss Universe pageant and host Steve Harvey doubled down on the apologies Monday after an excruciating live television moment—announcing incorrectly that Miss Colombia had won and then taking the crown from her head to give to a rival from the Philippines.

The fallout from Sunday's show made Harvey an online symbol of "oops" moments, drew a reaction from Colombia's president and even a gloating tweet from Donald Trump, the pageant's former owner.

As televised on Fox, the contest was down to Ariadna Gutierrez Arevalo of Colombia and Pia Alonzo Wurtzbach of the Philippines when Harvey, a first-time Miss Universe host, proclaimed Gutierrez the winner after a long dramatic pause.

Music swelled, Gutierrez was fitted for a sash, given flowers and a crown was placed on her head. That made it two straight Miss Universe winners for Colombia, where the pageants are taken seriously. She bathed in applause for nearly two minutes before Harvey slowly made his way back onto the stage.

"I have to apologize," he said. "The first runner-up is Colombia."

The camera switched to a bewildered-looking Wurtzbach, who came back on the stage to get the crown as the same celebratory music repeated. Harvey said she'd be taking her first walk as Miss Universe, but mostly she stood immobile. A woman stood in between the two contestants, trying to comfort Gutierrez by rubbing her back.

AP

Other contestants comfort Miss Colombia Ariadna Gutierrez, top right, after she was incorrectly crowned Miss Universe at the Miss Universe pageant Sunday, Dec. 20, 2015, in Las Vegas. According to the pageant, a misreading led the announcer to read Miss Colombia Ariadna Gutierrez as the winner before they took it away and gave it to Miss Philippines Pia Alonzo Wurtzbach, pictured on left.

Two minutes later, the comedian who hosts his own daytime talk show as well as the game show "Family Feud" returned, saying "let me just take control of this."

Harvey explained on the air that he misread the card he was given with the names of the winners. Colombia was listed as the first runner-up, and he'd been confused with how it was written. He held up the card for the camera.

"It is my mistake," he said. "Still, it's a great night. Please don't hold it against the ladies. We feel very badly, but it's still a great night."

Harvey later tweeted an apology to the women and viewers. "I feel terrible," he wrote. The Miss Universe organization also issued an apology on Monday.

Wurtzbach later said she was happy to win, but confused and concerned for her rival. She said she tried to approach her backstage, but the Colombian contestant was crying and surrounded by a crowd of women.

"I did not take the crown from her," Wurtzbach said.

Celebrations quickly turned to anger in Colombia, where the hashtag "Respect the Crown" was the country's top trending topic on Twitter. Even the president was upset.

"They put the crown on her head," President Juan Manuel Santos said Monday. "The photos are there to prove it. To me, as a Colombian, she is still Miss Universe."

It was the pageant's first time on Fox, and the Nielsen company said the contest was seen in the United States by 6.2 million people—strong numbers for the network. The previous Miss Universe on NBC, in January, reached 7.7 million people.

NBC dumped the pageant after Trump, its then-owner, angered many Latinos with comments about immigration. Trump subsequently sold the pageant and tweeted after the flub that it "would never have happened" on his watch. He retweeted someone else's comment that Trump must be happy that the pageant had gone "off the rails" after he sold it.

He softened his tone in an interview on NBC's Today Show, calling Harvey a "great guy" who handled it well. Trump said if he were still in charge of the show, he would make the women share the title.

"Things happen," he said. "It's live television."

Harvey, the comedian, found himself the butt of Internet jokes Monday. One prominent post showed his smiling face under the headline: "Happy Friday!" followed by "Wait, sorry, it's Monday."

Last year, the winner of the Miss Florida pageant had to give back her crown following a vote-tabulation error that was noticed days later. And a transcribing error caused the wrong author's name to be announced for a National Book Award in 2011. Neither event happened on live television, however.

Bill Cosby sues model Beverly Johnson over drugging claim

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Bill Cosby sued one of his most vocal accusers for defamation Monday, accusing supermodel Beverly Johnson of fabricating claims that the comedian drugged and tried to sexually assault her in the 1980s.

The lawsuit is part of a new legal strategy by Cosby to attack some of the women accusing him of sexual abuse in court. Cosby last week countersued several women accusing him of defamation, but the lawsuit against Johnson is the first time the comedian has taken legal action against a woman who hasn't sued him first.

Cosby's lawsuit accuses Johnson of lying about an incident in which she says Cosby drugged her with a cappuccino in his New York home before letting her go after she angrily rebuked his advances.

The suit contends Johnson, 63, has been using the story—first told in a Vanity Fair story and repeated in numerous interviews and a memoir—to try to rekindle her career.

Johnson's "false allegations against Mr. Cosby have been the centerpiece of her attempted resurgence and she has played them to the hilt, repeatedly and maliciously publishing the false accusations in articles, interviews, and television appearances," Cosby's lawsuit states.

It seeks unspecified damages and an injunction preventing the model from repeating her claims and requests they be removed from Johnson's memoir, which was released in August.

A call to Johnson's publicist Ann-Marie Nieves was not immediately returned.

Cosby's lawsuit states that a dinner described by Johnson was attended by his wife and he never spent time alone with the supermodel.

Cosby's response comes in the wake of counterclaims his attorneys filed last week in a Massachusetts federal court against seven women who are suing him there for defamation. Those women contend Cosby defamed them by allowing his representatives to brand them as liars.

In the countersuit, Cosby claims the women made "malicious, opportunistic, and false and defamatory accusations" of sexual misconduct against him that are "nothing more than an opportunistic attempt to extract financial gain from him."

Cosby is a defendant in six civil cases filed in Los Angeles, Massachusetts and Pittsburgh. Since late 2014, more than 50 women—most of whom have not sued—have accused the comedian of sexual abuse dating back decades. Cosby has never been criminally charged.

Cosby's attorneys on Friday asked a federal judge to dismiss a lawsuit by Renita Hill, who lives near Pittsburgh and has accused the comedian of drugging and having sex with her several times after they met on a children's educational TV show in 1983.

She went public with her allegations in a KDKA-TV news interview on Nov. 20, 2014, and contends blanket denials that Cosby sexually abused women issued since by the comedian, his wife and his attorney make Hill out to be a "liar" and an "extortionist."

Cosby's attorneys noted that those denials didn't refer to Hill by name or otherwise identify her. And even if they did, they are protected speech, they contend.

That's because statements that Cosby's accusers have engaged in "innuendo" or are otherwise motivated by greed are mere opinions, according to Hill's legal request to dismiss the lawsuit.

"Opinion, as a matter of law, is constitutionally protected and cannot support a plaintiff's defamation claim," the request says.

AP

In this Sept. 8, 2015 file photo, Beverly Johnson poses for a portrait in New York.

J.K. Rowling defends casting of black Hermione in new play

LONDON (AP)—A black actress playing Hermione Granger? J.K. Rowling has no problem with that.

The best-selling author of the "Harry Potter" books has responded to mixed reactions after the cast for "Harry Potter and the Cursed Child"—a new London play featuring Harry as an adult—was announced Monday. The role of Hermione, made famous in the film versions by Emma Watson, will be played by Swaziland-born actress Noma Dumezweni.

Rowling said on Twitter that the character's skin color had in fact never been specified in the books. "Canon: brown eyes, frizzy hair and very clever. White skin was never specified. Rowling loves black Hermione," she wrote, adding a kissing emoji at the end.

The play, based on a new story by Rowling and others, opens July 30.

Bill and Hillary Clinton to become grandparents, again

WASHINGTON (AP)—Chelsea Clinton, the only child of former President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, announced Monday that she is expecting her second child next summer.

"Charlotte is going to be a big sister! Feeling very blessed & grateful this holiday season," Chelsea Clinton wrote on Twitter.

Chelsea Clinton, 35, and her father have largely stayed off the campaign trail since Hillary Clinton launched her Democratic bid for the presidency in April.

Both have said they plan to intensify their public political roles after the New Year in an effort to boost Clinton's campaign just six weeks before the first round of primary voting.

The soon-to-be second-time grandparents tweeted out their congratulations Monday.

"Your dad and I could not be happier for you, Marc, and Charlotte. We're so excited to meet our second grandchild!" wrote Hillary Clinton.

In this Sept. 27, 2015, file photo, Chelsea Clinton, co-chair of the Clinton Foundation, speaks at the Clinton Global Initiative in New York.

AP

Bill Clinton added: "Christmas comes early! @HillaryClinton and I are thrilled for Chelsea, Marc and Charlotte's growing family in 2016!"

In a September interview on NBC's "Today," Chelsea Clinton said her mom was always game for singing "The Wheels on the Bus" to granddaughter Charlotte and was helping her learn to walk.

The younger Clinton is author of the book "It's Your World: Get Informed, Get Inspired & Get Going!"—an illustrated guide for young people looking to become involved in political and social causes.

Chelsea Clinton is married to hedge fund manager Marc Mezvinsky, the son of former U.S. congressman Edward Mezvinsky and former U.S. congresswoman Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky.

Presidents in cars getting coffee? Obama does Seinfeld show

HONOLULU (AP)—President Barack Obama will be Jerry Seinfeld's first guest when the seventh season of his online talk show, "Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee," opens Dec. 30.

The show features the New York comedian picking up fellow comics in classic cars and taking them out for coffee and conversation.

Obama and Seinfeld spoke at the White House earlier this month. The White House says they took turns circling the South Lawn in a 1963 Corvette Stingray split window coupe before chatting over coffee in a basement dining room. They spoke about what makes White House life both remarkable and routine.

The appearance is another example of Obama trying to appeal to new audiences.

The interview is scheduled for release Dec. 30 on Crackle, the Sony Pictures' online network, and at Comediansincarsgettingcoffee.com.

AP

Int his Nov. 4, 2015, file photo Jerry Seinfeld performs at the David Lynch Foundation Benefit Concert at Carnegie Hall in New York.

'Star Wars' fan in NY legally changes name to Darth Vader

CANANDAIGUA, N.Y. (AP)—Darth Vader is a tattooed 43-year-old former Marine who owns a gym and is raising funds online for a bone marrow transplant.

The Democrat and Chronicle of Rochester reports that a western New York man legally changed his name last year to match the villain in the "Star Wars" films.

The former Eric Welch, of Canandaigua (kan-un-DAY'-gwuh), says he grew up in foster homes and didn't have strong family ties to his name.

The "Star Wars" fan says he chose Darth Vader for his new name because the character carries an aura of leadership and toughness.

He tests his own toughness by competing in half-marathons and endurance events. He was diagnosed with leukemia in 2002.

A spokeswoman for the Department of Motor Vehicles confirms that Darth Vader is his legal name.

SHOWBIZ TIDBITS

Ukraine media says govt has banned Limp Bizkit leader Durst

MOSCOW (AP)—Ukrainian news media are reporting that the country's national security service has banned the leader of the group Limp Bizkit from entering the country for five years. Fred Durst, the founder of the group and its lead singer, was quoted in news reports in October as saying he was interested in buying a house in Crimea, the Black Sea region annexed by Russia in 2014. The Ukrainian online publication Apostrof on Monday reported that the security service in November had banned Durst's entry for five years "in the interests of guaranteeing the security of our state." The Interfax news agency reported that the security service had confirmed the ban, but did not give details.

Rapper The Game pleads not guilty in punching of officer

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Rapper The Game has pleaded not guilty to charges filed after he was accused of punching and threatening an off-duty police officer during a basketball game. The rapper, whose real name is Jayceon Taylor, entered the plea Monday in a Los Angeles courtroom. Taylor was charged in June with one felony count of making criminal threats and a misdemeanor assault and battery charge over the altercation that occurred in March. Los Angeles police officer Onyebuchi Awaji testified at a hearing earlier this month that Taylor threatened to kill him after punching him during the game after an intentional foul. A judge ruled there was sufficient evidence for Taylor to stand trial on the charges. No trial date has been set and the 36-year-old is scheduled to return to court on Jan. 11.

Wife's payback for cheating husband isn't worth the price

DEAR ABBY: I found out a few months ago that my husband, "Hal," the father of my children, has had affairs with five different women. I left, and we are now being divorced.

I desperately wanted revenge, so I have been secretly seeing Hal's good friend "Ron," whom he "forbade" me from contacting after I told him his infidelity and disrespect gave me permission to act on the attraction I had for Ron. It's just a friends-with-benefits situation and I am having fun, so I don't really consider it to be revenge.

Hal has spent the last five months begging me to forgive him and work on our marriage, but I no longer love him and I certainly don't trust him. I told him I would "work on" forgiving him, so now he calls, says he still loves me and flirts.

The last woman Hal cheated on me with is his current girlfriend. He told me that if I ever want to hook up, I should make sure to use code words when leaving messages because she might see my calls and text messages. He also told me that he is not interested in a longterm relationship with her.

I slept with Hal recently to have leverage. I was contemplating sending her the proof as payback for how she treated me some months back, although I don't want her boyfriend back. I am now questioning if this is the right thing to do. Should I just leave it alone?

PAYBACK SOMEWHERE IN THE USA

DEAR PAYBACK: Yes, do it for everyone's sake—including your own. This cycle of revenge is doing no one any good.

■■■

DEAR ABBY: Before we had kids, my wife and I would occasionally go out with groups of friends or to social functions, but it was difficult to get her to go home. She always liked closing the place down, and if we left early I felt like I was dragging her away.

For the first five years after our children were born we didn't get out much. My wife is now starting to go out with friends from work—a mixed group of single and married guys and gals. She has invited me to come along, but sitters are expensive and I'm not friendly with her co-workers. She stays out with them until 3 to 4 a.m. once a month. I think that's ridiculously late when you have a husband and children at home.

When she's not here, I can't sleep and I worry that something is wrong. She rarely calls to check in unless I ask her to. Overall I trust her, but with her drinking heavily and many single guys around, I don't feel comfortable with the situation. I don't know what to do.

LONELY DAD IN ARIZONA

DEAR LONELY DAD: I have it on good authority that last call for serving alcohol in Arizona is 2 a.m. Could your wife be drinking so heavily that she needs the time to sober up in order to drive home? If that's the case, she may be a binge drinker, which isn't healthy.

The implications of your letter are serious, so you should sit down with her and have a discussion about the amount she imbibes on her nights out. You shouldn't have to worry about her, so out of respect for your feelings, she should routinely let you know how long she'll be after the bars/clubs close.

DEAR ABBY

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

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Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson

SOMETIMES AT NIGHT I WORRY ABOUT THINGS AND THEN I CAN'T FALL ASLEEP.
IN THE DARK, IT'S EASIER TO IMAGINE AWFUL POSSIBILITIES THAT YOU'D NEVER BE PREPARED FOR.
AND IT'S HARD TO FEEL COURAGEOUS IN LOOSE-FITTING, DROWSY BEAR JAMMIES.
THAT'S WHY TIGERS SLEEP IN THE BUFF!

Garfield®

By Jim Davis

Adam@home

By Bryan Basset

CHECK IT OUT! THE ULTIMATE CHRISTMAS SWEATER!
AND WATCH THIS. I TUG THIS DECORATIVE BALL HERE AND...
"FELIZ NAVIDAD" AND A DAZZLING LIGHT SHOW!
I WANNA WISH YOU A MERRY...
BZZZ
GAAH!! IT SPRAYED SOMETHING IN MY EYES!
SORRY. THAT'S THE PINE SCENT FEATURE.
PFFT
PFF

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

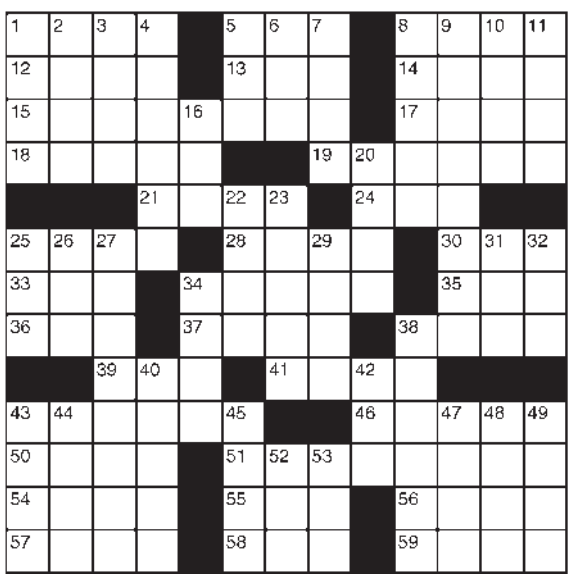
ACROSS
1 Wild guess
5 "I'll bet!"
8 "— with the Wind"
12 Sea predator
13 Hosp. scan
14 Wicked
15 Led Zeppelin's music
17 "Little" Dickens girl
18 Swiss watch brand
19 Main dish
21 Diamond heads?
24 Compass pt.
25 Deep-red
28 Jazzy James
30 Purpose
33 Dot.com address
34 Impose (upon)
35 Mexicali Mrs.
36 Juan's uncle
37 O'Neill's "— Christie"
38 "Saving Private —"
39 Battle
41 Small chamber group
43 Returning soldier's cry
46 Young studs?
50 Den din
51 Sitting duck, to a swindler
54 Gas station store
55 Ignited
56 Needle case
57 Forever — day
58 Devious
59 Land document

DOWN
1 London district
2 Ore carrier
3 Land measure
4 Villain
5 Medical care gp.
6 Lob's path
7 Scouting outing
8 Classy chaps
9 Eggs order
10 "Aida" river
11 Vogue rival
16 Ewe's mate
20 "Nifty!"
22 Drudge
23 Tour of duty
25 Groove
26 Mentalist Geller
27 Windbag
29 Romanov leader
31 Roth —
32 Chess piece
34 Rural spread
38 Lodged
40 Main artery
42 Cold, as a stare
43 — la Douce
44 "I ate too much" sound
45 Wriggly fish
47 Overdue
48 Loyal
49 Winter road hazard
52 Have a bug
53 Hog haven

Solution time: 23 mins.

M	A	A	M	■	B	I	T	■	W	H	A	V
A	L	T	O	■	A	C	H	■	H	U	V	E
P	E	A	R	T	R	E	E	■	A	T	O	R
■	■	■	R	A	N	■	N	A	T	U	R	E
T	H	A	I	N	■	D	E	L	I	■	■	■
I	O	N	S	■	C	A	R	E	F	R	E	E
D	V	D	■	C	A	R	V	E	■	U	S	A
Y	E	S	S	I	R	F	F	■	P	S	S	T
■	■	■	P	A	T	S	■	H	O	H	O	S
W	O	O	H	O	O	■	K	I	M	■	■	■
O	M	N	I	■	O	N	A	S	P	R	E	E
K	I	I	N	■	N	F	O	■	O	B	I	T
S	T	Y	X	■	S	I	S	■	M	I	N	E

Yesterday's answer 12-23



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955**! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Greg Biffle, 46; Eddie Vedder, 51; Susan Lucci, 69; Harry Shearer, 72.

Happy Birthday: Changes must be brought about for the right reasons. Ulterior motives and emotional deception will cloud your vision. Stick to what you know and try to make the most of what you have to offer. Let your skills and your genuine desire to help others be your calling card. Keep indulgences to a minimum and creativity turned up to the max. Your numbers are 1, 6, 14, 22, 25, 34, 48.

ARIES (*March 21-April 19*): Impulsive action and responses due to additional anxiety will make it difficult for you to decipher what others are thinking. Don't let situations escalate because of false assumptions. Diplomacy and practicality will help you avoid conflict. ✪✪✪✪

TAURUS (*April 20-May 20*): Relax and enjoy the merriment of the season. Engage in laughter with friends and relatives, and make plans with someone you love. A thoughtful gift or gesture will add to popularity among your peers. ✪✪✪

GEMINI (*May 21-June 20*): You'll be sensitive to what others say and do. Don't show your feelings or someone is likely to use your vulnerability against you. Indulgence is not a good idea, especially if you are celebrating with your peers. ✪✪✪

CANCER (*June 21-July 22*): Put aside time for play. Getting together with the youngsters in your family or making special plans with your lover will improve your relationships and ensure good tidings throughout the holiday season. ✪✪✪

LEO (*July 23-Aug. 22*): Take this opportunity to rearrange your decor or to prepare for the upcoming holidays. Don't reveal secrets to anyone or someone will criticize you. Consider the changes you want to make in the new year and lay down the groundwork. ✪✪✪✪

VIRGO (*Aug. 23-Sept. 22*): Don't feel limited by the demands other people make. Do your best to keep moving forward. Your practical, determined nature and your precise and patient way of handling situations will result in personal success. Put time aside for romance. ✪✪

LIBRA (*Sept. 23-Oct. 22*): Don't let the craziness of the season or difficult people get to you. Focus on making personal changes that will help you head into the upcoming year in tip-top shape. ✪✪✪✪✪

SCORPIO (*Oct. 23-Nov. 21*): Communication will help keep things moving along smoothly. Discuss your plans and help others find solutions to dilemmas that crop up and you will form good alliances with those who can help you build a brighter future. Romance is on the rise. ✪✪✪

SAGITTARIUS (*Nov. 22-Dec. 21*): Don't get down emotionally when you should get moving. Bring about the adjustments at home or to the way you live that will alleviate unnecessary stress. Keep your interaction with peers professional. Overindulgent behavior will work against you. ✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN (*Dec. 22-Jan. 19*): Keep your eyes and ears open. There is valuable information being passed around at industry functions or family reunions. Gains can be made if you put your money in the right place. An unusual proposition looks promising. Romance is encouraged. ✪✪✪

AQUARIUS (*Jan. 20-Feb. 18*): Keep busy taking care of personal business and checking into ways that you can set yourself up for financial gains in the new year. Don't let someone's secretive nature get you down. Focus on home, family and achieving greater personal security. ✪✪✪✪

PISCES (*Feb. 19-March 20*): Don't expect favors to come through. Someone is likely to offer you false information. Don't get angry, just plan to do things yourself to avoid disappointment. If you don't count on others, everything will run smoothly. Romance is highlighted. ✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are helpful, persistent and intense. You are intelligent and outspoken.

*Eugenia's website—**eugenialast.com**, Eugenia's android app @ **http://bit.ly/exhoro** and join Eugenia on **twitter/facebook/linkedin**.*

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

				2				
			1		3			
		9				5		
	6						1	
4		1	6	8	5	7		9
	7						5	
	4			7	8		3	
	9			1	2		6	
	1	5	9	6	4	2	7	

Difficulty Level ★★★ 12/23

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's SUDOKU Answer

8	2	5	4	7	9	6	3	1
3	9	6	5	1	2	7	4	8
1	7	4	3	6	8	2	9	5
7	5	8	2	9	3	1	6	4
4	3	9	1	5	6	8	7	2
6	1	2	7	8	4	3	5	9
2	4	1	9	3	7	5	8	6
5	6	3	8	4	1	9	2	7
9	8	7	6	2	5	4	1	3

Difficulty Level ★★

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WONDERWORD®

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the **WONDERWORD.**

FAMILY ROOTS Solution: 9 letters

C	T	B	A	S	L	R	I	G	F	A	T	H	E	R
O	H	O	L	G	C	O	U	S	I	N	S	I	R	E
A	T	I	W	E	E	C	A	R	T	N	I	S	U	C
T	U	R	L	N	T	S	A	P	O	N	P	T	T	O
O	S	(N)	E	D	B	O	Y	S	F	I	M	O	U	R
F	N	(A)	T	E	R	C	E	O	H	A	E	R	F	D
A	O	(M)	O	R	U	E	R	S	D	Y	M	Y	O	S
R	I	(E)	R	L	R	M	N	A	G	O	B	I	E	S
M	T	I	T	G	A	O	U	O	T	P	E	D	L	E
S	A	U	I	T	I	G	L	H	R	T	R	L	C	Y
H	R	D	I	T	H	A	E	A	G	I	S	O	N	E
E	E	O	A	T	E	R	I	N	Y	E	G	E	U	E
P	N	L	E	N	A	T	U	R	E	O	N	I	R	D
H	E	R	E	D	I	T	Y	T	I	C	R	E	N	C
R	G	G	R	A	N	D	P	A	R	E	N	T	S	S

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Ages, Aunt, Boys, Children, City, Coat of Arms, Cousins, Crest, Culture, Daughter, Eyes, Family, Father, Future, Gender, Genealogy, Generations, Genes, Girls, Grandparents, Hair, Heredity, History, Information, Members, Mother, Name, Nature, Origins, Past, Pedigrees, Proud, Records, Relationships, Royal, Sons, Town, Trace, Tree, Uncle

Yesterday's Answer: Boxing

Treasury 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 or 21 can be purchased online at www.WonderWordBooks.com. (Contain 130 puzzles.)

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Find today's solution in classified section

Spurs top Pacers for 6th victory in a row

SAN ANTONIO (AP)—A physical matchup on both ends of the court brought out the best in the San Antonio Spurs, especially Kawhi Leonard.

Leonard had 24 points, six rebounds and five assists and helped hold Paul George to a season-low seven points, and San Antonio surged past Indiana for a 106-92 victory Monday night to remain undefeated at home.

"They imposed their will in the second half, like they do here," Pacers coach Frank Vogel said. "We just couldn't get over that hump. We kept hanging around, hanging around. (There was a) loose ball play that went their way or they make a 3 or just something that prevented us from getting over the hump."

San Antonio (24-5) has won six straight and is off to the second best start in franchise history, including 16-0 at home.

The Spurs won their 21st game by double figures, turning a closely contested game into a rout in the second half.

Tony Parker had 15 points, including nine in the final quarter, for San Antonio. Boris Diaw added 14 points and LaMarcus Aldridge and Patty Mills had 10 each.

David West had seven points and five rebounds in his first game against the Pacers since leaving in the offseason to sign with the Spurs.

George Hill and Jordan Hill each had 15 points for Indiana (16-11).

Two of the league's top defenses fought early. The Spurs lead the league in opponent scoring at 88.9 points and the Pacers are seventh at 92.7.

San Antonio had just six points in the first six minutes of the game, two fewer than Indiana.

Leonard and George had their own heated battle, with each trying to get the best of the other on both ends of the court.

"It's fun matchup and I look at it like a game within a game," George said.

George was held to 1-for-14 shooting. It was his worst career performance with that many shot attempts. His previous low was seven points on 12 field goal attempts.

Hawks 106, Trail Blazers 97

In Atlanta, Dennis Schroder scored 18 points, and the Atlanta Hawks beat the Portland Trail Blazers 106-97 on Monday night for their fourth straight win.

Schroder, Atlanta's backup point guard, lost a cap bonded to a tooth in a collision early in the fourth period, but was 7 for 10 from the floor in a little more than 17 minutes on the court. The Hawks had six players score in double figures.

The Trail Blazers played without starting guards Damon Lillard and C.J. McCollum. Lillard has plantar fasciitis in his left foot and missed a game for the first time in his career, ending his streak of playing in 275 consecutive games. McCollum has two sprained ankles.

Allen Crabbe had 19 points for Portland in a fill-in start. Tim Frazier, making his first start of the season, had 12 points and seven assists.

The Trail Blazers have lost four straight.

Rockets 102, Hornets 95

In Houston, James Harden scored 36 points, and the Rockets squandered a double-digit lead in the fourth quarter before coming back for the win.

The game was tied before Harden drove into the lane and was fouled as he made a layup. He hit the free throws to put Houston up 94-91 with 31.6 seconds left.

Cody Zeller attempted a dunk contested by Terrence Jones and it bounced off the rim and back to the Rockets a few seconds later. The Hornets fouled Patrick Beverley and he made two free throws to extend the lead to 96-91.

Harden made 16 of 19 free throws and secured Houston's third straight win by making two with 13.9 seconds remaining.

Kemba Walker led the Hornets with 14 points.

Nets 105, Bulls 102

In Chicago, Brook Lopez had 21 points and 12 rebounds, and the Nets stopped a five-game losing streak.

Brooklyn's Thaddeus Young added 16 points and 13 boards. Wayne Ellington made three 3-pointers and scored 13 points.

Chicago center Joakim Noah sprained his left shoulder late in the third quarter, forcing him from the game.

Jimmy Butler scored 24 points in the Bulls' third straight loss. Pau Gasol added 20 points and nine rebounds.

Butler said before the game that he didn't regret his critical comments of first-year coach Fred Hoiberg two days earlier following a loss in New York.

Wizards 113, Kings 99

In Washington, John Wall had a career-high 19 assists and also scored 12 points, leading Washington to the victory.

Marcin Gortat had 27 points and 16 rebounds for the Wizards, and Garrett Temple added a career-high 23 points.

Wall was just 4-for-15 shooting but assisted on nearly half of Washington's 42 baskets. He connected with Gortat several times on a night when injuries limited coach Randy Wittman to using only eight players.

DeMarcus Cousins led Sacramento with 22 points, Rudy Gay had 16.

Jazz 110, Suns 89

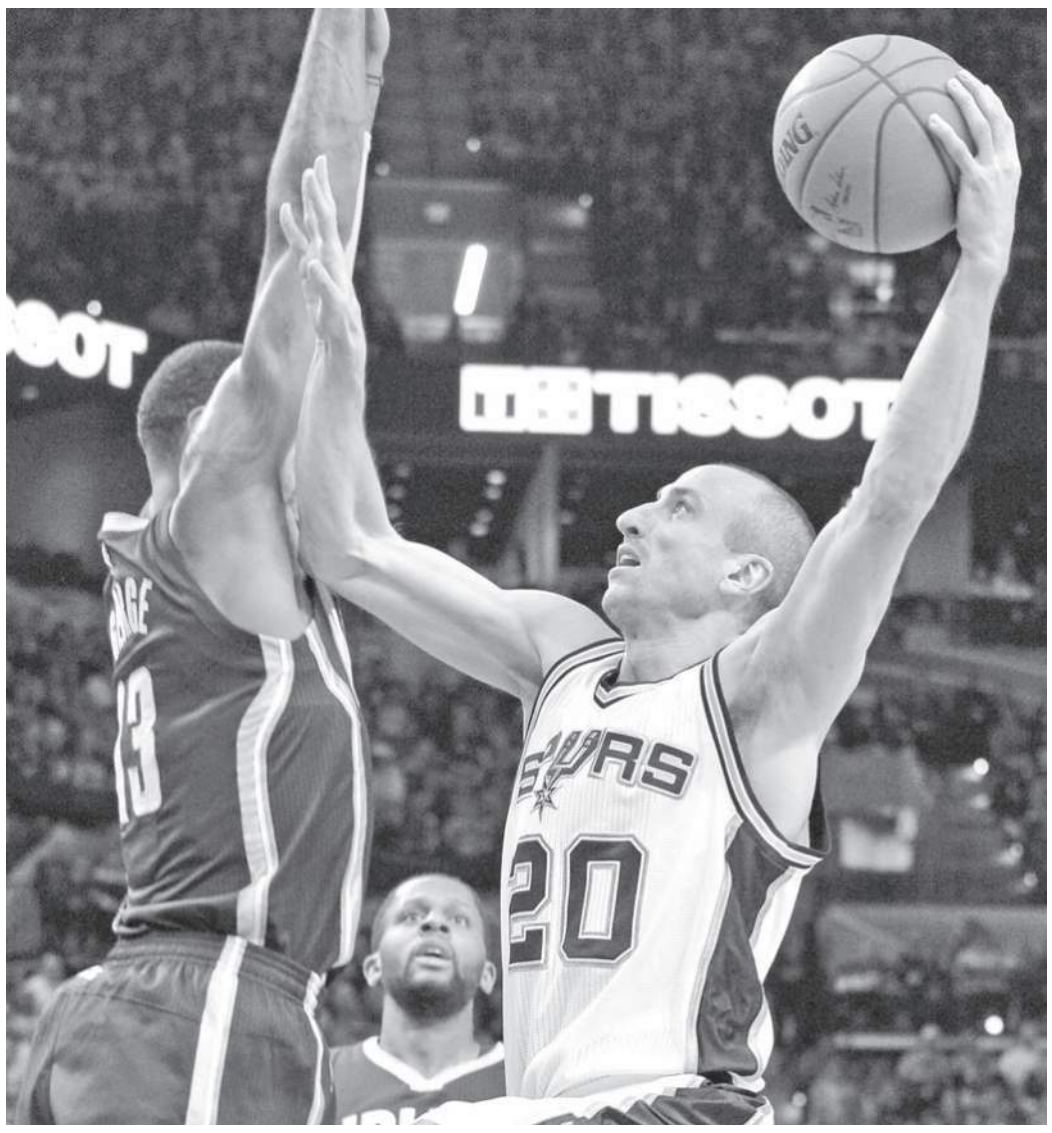
In Salt Lake City, Gordon Hayward scored 24 points to help Utah cruise to the win.

The Jazz won consecutive games for the first time in December and reached 100 points for the first time in the last six games.

Utah opened the third quarter with a 12-0 run to push a 10-point halftime lead to 66-43.

Jazz forward Derrick Favors finished with 18 points and nine rebounds.

Brandon Knight led the Suns with 26 points.



AP

San Antonio Spurs guard Manu Ginobili shoots against Indiana Pacers forward Paul George during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Monday, Dec. 21, 2015, in San Antonio. San Antonio won, 106-92.

Celtics 113, Timberwolves 99

In Boston, Kelly Olynyk scored 19 points, Jae Crowder had 18 and the Celtics beat the Timberwolves while the crowd begged to see former Boston player Kevin Garnett.

Tyler Zeller scored 14 points and grabbed eight rebounds before fouling out. David Lee had 13 points and eight boards to help Boston snap a three-game losing streak.

Minnesota coach Sam Mitchell said before the game that the 39-year-old Garnett would rest because it was the second of back-to-backs after the Timberwolves beat Brooklyn. The crowd loudly chanted "We want KG!" close to a dozen times.

Garnett signed a two-year deal with Minnesota over the summer, but this could have been his last game in Boston.

Andrew Wiggins led the Timberwolves with 26 points. Karl-Anthony Towns had 25 points and 16 rebounds.

Magic 107, Knicks 99

In New York, Nikola Vucevic tied his season high with 26 points and grabbed nine rebounds, powering Orlando to the road win.

Vucevic had a pair of baskets and Evan Fournier added a 3-pointer and another basket in an 11-2 spurt after the Knicks had cut it to 93-92 with 3:25 left. Victor Oladipo finished that decisive run with a breakaway dunk that made it 104-94 with 1:07 to go.

Tobias Harris scored 20 points and Fournier had 16 for the Magic, who rebounded from Sunday's loss to Atlanta to win for the fourth time in five games.

Lance Thomas was 9 for 9 and tied his career with 24 points for the Knicks, who had won four in a row.

Shaq, Iverson, Yao headlines HOF candidates

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. (AP)—Shaquille O'Neal, Allen Iverson and Yao Ming are among the first-time candidates on the ballot for the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame.

Michigan State coach Tom Izzo and former women's star Sheryl Swoopes are also among the candidates announced Monday for the class of 2016. The finalists will be announced on Feb. 12 during the NBA's All-Star weekend, and those being enshrined will be unveiled April 4 in Houston before the NCAA championship game.

O'Neal and Yao became eligible last week when the Hall amended its eligibility procedures, making players eligible after four full seasons of retirement. It was previously five years, which meant they were six years removed from their playing careers when they were enshrined.

With four NBA championships, one Most Valuable Player award (plus seven more top-five finishes in MVP voting), three NBA Finals MVP trophies, 14 All-NBA appearances (including eight First Team nods), gold medals in the 1994 FIBA World Championship and 1996 Summer Olympics, and two NBA scoring titles, Shaq is a stone-cold lead-pipe lock to make it on his first try. Iverson might not be—I think his seven All-NBA selections, 11 All-Star berths, four scoring titles, one MVP, placement in the top 25 in NBA history in per-game scoring and total points, and overall impact on the culture of the game should get him there, but as SB Nation's Tom Ziller noted back in September, the "secretive voting body in charge of the Hall" might not be as excited about ushering A.I. into Springfield as those of us who grew up on his game.

Yao presents an interesting case in his own right. His resume includes five All-NBA appearances (two Second Team, three Third Team) in nine NBA seasons, with four shortened by injuries (he played just five games in 2010-11 before retiring) and one (2009-10) in which he didn't play at all; one Chinese Basketball Association championship and MVP award; three FIBA Asia Championships and MVP awards; and quarterfinal appearances with the Chinese national team during the 2004 and 2008 Summer Olympics. In terms of pure NBA on-court accomplishments in the NBA, Basketball-Reference.com's Hall of Fame Probability Index rates Yao's chances of inclusion at slightly better than a coin flip—52.59 percent, just below Maurice Cheeks (who hasn't been enshrined) and just above Dennis Johnson (who was inducted in 2010).

Yao's the only first-timer in the International Committee's nominations. Other nominees include former NBA players Vlade Divac, Toni Kukoc and Dino Radja, all of whom starred for the Yugoslavian national team in the late 1980s; legendary Greek point guard Nick Galis; and FIBA greats Amaury Pasos, Aldo Ossola and Manuel "Lolo" Sainz, among others.

Other players joining O'Neal and Iverson among North American nominees include Cheeks, Tim Hardaway, Chris Webber, Kevin Johnson, Marques Johnson, Mark Aguirre, Terry Cummings, A.C. Green, Sidney Moncrief, Swen Nater, Mark Price, Jack Sikma, Reggie Theus and Paul Westphal. George McGinnis, who spent four stellar years with the Indiana Pacers of the ABA and made three NBA All-Star teams in seven post-merger seasons, will also be considered by the North American committee, following the Hall's decision to eliminate the special direct-election committee for candidates whose resumes skewed toward the ABA days. Several other ABA luminaries, such as Zelmo Beatty, Ron Boone, Mack Calvin and Freddie Lewis, will be routed through the Veterans Committee, and will face just one round of voting rather than the two rounds of balloting in the North American and Women's Committees.

Stafford helps Lions survive Saints' late rally

NEW ORLEANS (AP)—Matthew Stafford's accuracy and poise sparked the Detroit Lions to a big lead and helped prevent them from squandering it, too.

Stafford passed for 254 yards and three touchdowns, and the Lions held off a late surge by New Orleans to defeat the Saints 35-27 on Monday night.

Detroit (5-9) raced to a 28-3 lead, but Drew Brees threw a pair of touchdown passes —one shortly after a Lions fumble —to help New Orleans (5-9) pull to 28-20 with about 10 minutes left.

Brees passed for 341 yards and three touchdowns, becoming only the fourth quarterback to surpass 60,000 yards in a career while also eclipsing the 4,000-yard mark for the 10th straight season. Brandin Cooks caught 10 passes for 124 yards and a touchdown.

But New Orleans' loss guaranteed consecutive losing seasons for the first time since Sean Payton became coach in 2006.

Golden Tate caught two touchdown passes for Detroit. The Lions' last-ranked running game accounted for 150 yards and two TDs against New Orleans' last-ranked run defense.

Stafford played nearly mistake-free, completing 22 of 25 passes without turning the ball over.

Still, both teams took turns making the kinds of mistakes that losing teams do, producing a close game after it initially looked as if Detroit would run away with it.

The Lions led 28-3 when Ameer Abdullah scored on a 15-yard run around the left end early in the third quarter. New Orleans responded with Brees' 27-yard touchdown pass to Cooks and closed the gap a little more on Kai Forbath's short field goal after the Lions made a clutch stop on a third-and-goal from the 4.

But Abdullah fumbled on Detroit's next play from scrimmage, and the Saints capitalized on Brees' 11-yard scoring strike to Marques Colston.

Yet, when Detroit looked ripe to self-destruct, the Lions put together a clutch scoring drive that included Abdullah's 27-yard run and Joique Bell's short rushing TD.

Brees' late touchdown to Ben Watson closed the gap with 1:55 left, but New Orleans' onside kick was recovered by Detroit star Calvin Johnson, and the Lions marched deep into Saints territory before Matt Prater missed a field goal with 9 seconds left.

The Lions led 21-3 by halftime on Tate's touchdown catches of 1 and 5 yards and fullback Michael Burton's first career touchdown from 4 yards out on his fourth catch this season.

The Saints thought they had found the end zone three times on their final drive of the first half but came away with no points.

First, Cooks made a spectacular one-handed catch of Brees' 28-yard pass and was initially ruled to have scored as he was tackled near the goal line, but the call was changed after a video review, marking Cooks down at the 1.

Soon after, running back Tim Hightower found the end zone with a second-effort run, but New Orleans was flagged for illegal formation, with officials saying lineman Senio Kelemete failed to report as an eligible tight end. After two short runs, the Saints kept the offense on the field on fourth down and Brees connected with Marques Colston in the end zone, but New Orleans was flagged for an illegal man downfield, and the required 10-second runoff ended the half.

Meanwhile, in Tennessee, quarterback Marcus Mariota will miss the Titans' home finale Sunday with Houston with a sprained MCL in his right knee.

Whether Mariota is done for the season has yet to be decided, though interim coach Mike Mularkey said the Titans will err on the side of caution.

Mularkey said Monday that Mariota will be re-evaluated after the Texans' game with the rookie wanting to play the season finale at Indianapolis on Jan. 3. But Mularkey said Mariota has not been ruled out of the finale with an injury that is less serious than the sprained left knee that kept the quarterback out of two games earlier this season.

"Certainly if there's any issues, if we have any concerns as we did (Sunday), we would not play him," Mularkey said. "If there's any way he was going to not be capable of playing, no way."

Mariota was hurt when sacked for the third time at 10:32 of the second quarter in a 33-16 loss at New England. Mularkey said the rookie wanted to return against the Patriots, but the Titans chose to protect Mariota by keeping him on the sideline.

The rookie has thrown for 2,818 yards with 19 touchdowns and 10 interceptions despite being sacked 38 times this season. He is completing 62.2 percent of his passes and has a 91.5 passer rating.

Playing Mariota gives the rookie precious game experience if he proves a fast healer. If Mariota doesn't play again this season, Mularkey said the rookie easily has exceeded expectations in a debut year featuring a head coaching change, six different starting offensive line combinations and injuries forcing lineup changes.

AP

Detroit Lions quarterback Matthew Stafford (9) is sacked by New Orleans Saints outside linebacker Kasim Edebali (91) in the first half of an NFL football game in New Orleans, Monday, Dec. 21, 2015.

SIDEBAR

Charles Woodson to retire after 18th season

ALAMEDA, Calif. (AP)—Charles Woodson's return to Oakland began with hundreds of fans gathering at the team's facility urging him to come back.

The second stint will come to an end following an emotional farewell at the Oakland Coliseum.

Woodson announced Monday he will retire following his 18th NFL season, ending a career that included a Heisman Trophy, a Super Bowl title and numerous other honors.

Woodson said he realized late last month that he couldn't play another season and wanted to announce his decision before playing his final home game Thursday night against San Diego.

"I felt it was only right that Raiders fans, my fans, fans that have watched me play for a long time, I'd let them all know that this Thursday night would be the last time in the Coliseum I would be able to run out there in front of our fans at home," Woodson said at a news conference.

Woodson is one of the most accomplished defensive backs to play the game, ranking fifth all-time with 65 interceptions and tied for first with Rod Woodson and Darren Sharper with 13 defensive touchdowns.

He won the AP Defensive Rookie of the Year award in 1998, AP Defensive Player of the Year in 2009 and is a three-time, first-team All Pro selection.

"Charles Woodson is one of those players that comes along and reminds you why you love the game," general manager Reggie McKenzie said.

"He is truly a one of a kind player that goes above and beyond his Heisman Trophy and future gold jacket. It has been an honor to have worked alongside Charles for so many years and have the confidence to call him what he truly is: the G.O.A.T. He is, without a doubt, the embodiment of what it means to be a Raider."

Woodson is still playing at a high level at age 39, despite dealing with a shoulder injury he sustained in the season opener and forced him out for a few plays Sunday after a hard hit on former teammate Randall Cobb.

Woodson has played 965 defensive snaps this season and has five interceptions and three fumble recoveries, ranking second in the NFL with eight takeaways.

"There are so many players who play this sport and other sports who would like to go out that way, playing well, doing what they love to do," he said. "I feel very good about the way I performed not only this year but my whole career."

Despite dealing with several injuries early in his career, Woodson has played the second-most games of any defensive back in NFL history with 252.

Only Hall of Famer Darrell Green has more with 295 and Woodson will join Green in the Hall in Canton, Ohio, soon.

Woodson said he told owner Mark Davis, McKenzie and coach Jack Del Rio of his decision earlier Monday. He then told his teammates in an emotional meeting that he was retiring.

"Honestly, I think physically I could do it," he said. "My body has responded. But mentally, it's not there. It's not going to happen."

Those emotions will only be stronger Thursday night when Woodson takes the field at the Oakland Coliseum for the final time. The game might also be the final NFL contest in the Coliseum as the Raiders could move to the Los Angeles area after the season.

"Coming back here and playing for the second time we were able to rekindle something that we had years ago," Woodson said. "It was really fun coming back here and playing. It will be a pretty emotional day."

Woodson burst onto the football scene as a college star at Michigan when he won the Heisman Trophy and helped the Wolverines win a share of the national championship in 1997.

He was then picked fourth overall by the Raiders and immediately made an impact, winning the defensive rookie of the year. He helped revive the Raiders and lead them to three straight playoff berths capped by an AFC championship in the 2002 season.

But the Raiders couldn't break through for a Super Bowl title, losing the AFC title game at home to Baltimore in the 2000 season, falling to New England in the "Tuck Rule" game the next season and then losing the Super Bowl to Tampa Bay the following year.

Injuries hampered Woodson the next three seasons and he left for Green Bay as a free agent in 2006. That revitalized his career as he had 37 interceptions his first six years with Green Bay, winning the Super Bowl following the 2010 season.

But the Packers cut him after the 2012 season and after getting little interest in free agency, he finally returned to Oakland. He arrived for a free-agent visit only to be greeted by fans begging him to come back.

"That day was pretty awesome to come here and pull up and see all of the Raider fans still having love for me," he said. "That was really cool."

The Raiders won just seven games his first two seasons before being competitive this season with a 6-8 mark heading into the final two games.

Woodson said he will miss standing on the field for the national anthem and traveling to road games with his teammates the most. But he decided he wanted to spend more time with his family, his winery and perhaps start a TV career.

Blatter, Platini vow to fight eight-year ban

ZURICH—FIFA's ethics tribunal banned Sepp Blatter and Michel Platini for eight years Monday, saying they had abused their positions over a suspect $2 million payment.

In a verdict that heightened the crisis in football's scandal-plagued world body, the court strongly criticised the FIFA president and vice president, saying there was "no legal basis" for the payment that Blatter authorised for Platini in 2011.

While full-blown corruption charges were dropped, both men angrily vowed to fight the bans.

Blatter said he felt he was being used as a "punching ball" and declared: "I will fight to the end."

The ban, which starts immediately, promises to end 79-year-old Blatter's four decades with FIFA in disgrace. It is also a devastating blow to Platini's hopes of taking over as head of FIFA in an election on February 26.

European football leaders said the case was a worry however. Dutch football federation president Michael van Praag, a former challenger to Blatter for the FIFA leadership, called the sentence "extremely scandalous" for world football.

The German federation's acting leader Reinhard Rauball said "changing faces" would not be enough for FIFA. "They must regain trust and credibility. It is going to take years."

"I think this is punishment enough, because it means they can never come back," former UEFA president Lennart Johansson told the Swedish daily Expressen.

Blatter, FIFA's president since 1998, was fined 50,000 Swiss francs ($50,000/46,300 euros) while Platini, the head of UEFA, Europe's governing body, was fined 80,000 Swiss francs.

FIFA suspended the pair and launched an inquiry in October after Swiss prosecutors accused Blatter of criminal mismanagement over the two million Swiss franc ($2 million/1.8 million euro) payment that was caught with special software.

AP

Suspended FIFA President Sepp Blatter answers to questions during his press conference to respond to the FIFA ethics committee's verdict, at former FIFA's headquarters Hotel Sonnenberg in Zurich, Switzerland, Monday, Dec. 21, 2015.

'Abusive execution'

A statement by the FIFA tribunal said Blatter and Platini were guilty of "abusive execution" of their powers over the payment.

The judges said there was a conflict of interest and "no legal basis" for the transfer in their written agreement on advisory work by Platini between 1999 and 2002.

Blatter's "assertion of an oral agreement was determined as not convincing and was rejected by the chamber."

The court said: "Mr Blatter's actions did not show commitment to an ethical attitude."

The judgement was even more damning of French football legend Platini.

"Mr Platini failed to act with complete credibility and integrity, showing unawareness of the importance of his duties and concomitant obligations and responsibilities."

Under the ban, neither Blatter nor Platini can go near the FIFA headquarters in Zurich. Blatter cannot speak on behalf of the world body and Platini cannot even act as a television commentator for the European Championships he has helped to organize in France next year, a source close to FIFA said.

Both strongly deny any wrongdoing. Blatter spent eight hours before a FIFA court last Thursday while Platini boycotted his hearing on Friday saying he had been "convicted" in advance.

Blatter told a press conference he felt he had been "betrayed" and used as a "punching ball."

He said he would go to FIFA's appeal committee, the Court of Arbitration for Sports and the Swiss courts if necessary.

He insisted the FIFA ethics committee had no right to depose him as president.

Blatter was campaigning for reelection in 2011 but insisted he had not offered a bribe to Platini.

"Never in my life I would offer money to get something. This hurts me really in my heart," he said.

Platini said in a statement that the FIFA decision was a "masquerade" intended to "sully" his name.

FIFA in chaos

He said he would go to the Court of Arbitration for Sport and civil courts.

"This verdict is just a pathetic coverup for a desire to eliminate me from the world of football."

FIFA said they had 10 days to appeal to its judiciary.

Blatter would be fighting for his reputation. For Platini, the ban rules him out of the FIFA election to be held on February 26.

The deadline for candidates to be registered and pass an integrity check is January 26.

With FIFA's reputation in tatters after the arrest of several top officials, Blatter announced four days after winning re-election to a fifth term in May that he would stand down and call a new election.

Seven FIFA officials were arrested in a luxury Zurich hotel two days before the election congress.

Now US authorities have charged 39 football officials and sports business executives over more than $200 million in bribes for football television and marketing deals.

Swiss prosecutors are in parallel investigating FIFA's management and the award of the 2018 and 2022 World Cups to Russia and Qatar.

Facing pressure from governments and the International Olympic Committee for major reforms, there are currently five candidates to take over FIFA: Asian football head Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim al-Khalifa of Bahrain, South African politician and tycoon Tokyo Sexwale, former FIFA vice president Prince Ali bin al Hussein of Jordan, UEFA general-secretary Gianni Infantino and Jerome Champagne, a former FIFA assistant general secretary from France.

SAIPAN

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first 20 minutes of play.

However, McDonald's lost the driver's seat in the third period, as Derrick Rangamar and Henry William teamed up in Saipan Ice's fightback. Rangamar drilled 14 of his game-high 28 points in the third frame, while William chipped in 10 to give the lead back to Saipan Ice, 59-56, entering the final canto.

It was a close game since then and McDonald's was still in contention, down by only 5, 66-71, going into the last two minutes of the match. However, McDonald's was held to one field goal in the homestretch, while Rangamar, Welson, Ben Olopai, and John Santy delivered the killer blows to extend Saipan Ice's streak to three.

Meanwhile, in the first game, Tan Holdings cruised to a 104-89 win against Top Development, Inc. to finish the elimination with a 7-1 slate.

Tan Holdings prevailed in its last two matches after absorbing its lone loss in the season at the hands of the unbeaten Micronesian Brokers, Inc./Kentucky Fried Chicken, while TDI fell to a 1-6 mark.

Tan Holdings played without team captain Elmer Esdrelon, but his absence was hardly felt as Paul Quizon and Jared Matsutaro stepped up and combined for nearly half of the team's total output. Quizon scored 28 points, while Matsutaro contributed 22.

Henry Manipon had a game-high 32 points for TDI, which will play Mariana Resort today in its last game in the elimination. TDI must win against Mariana Resort and pray that CUC loses to Docomo in the other match tonight to make it to the playoffs. Only the Top 8 teams will advance to the next round and CUC and TDI are tied for eighth to ninth place with their similar 1-6 marks.

MBI/KFC and Joeten will complete tonight's triple-header with the winner getting the top ranking in the playoffs.

First Game

Tan Holdings 104 – Quizon 28, Matsutaro 22, Rivera 15, Macoto 10, Nonato 10, Kim 9, Pablo 8.

TDI 89 – Manipon 32, Velasco 32, Pollisco 12, Arreza 8, Lumayag 5.

Scoring by quarters: 25-15, 55-45, 77-64, 104-89.

Second Game

Saipan Ice 82 – Rangamar 28, William 18, Welson 11, Santy 9, Kaipat 8, Olopai 6, Villagomez 2.

McDonald's 68 – Gaspar 16, Mc. Achas 16, Mi. Achas 14, Gapor 12, Palacios 3, Ayuyu 3, Manibusna 2, Rigua 2.

Scoring by quarters: 14-11, 27-39, 59-56, 82-68.

BLUE

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not pressed to pour in points in the fourth quarter where Cholos tried, but failed to overhaul the deficit, as only Jun Tabora and Rocyl Ritual hit baskets in streaks.

De Dios paced Blue Haus with his 21 points. Five other Blue Haus players finished in twin digits with Fernando, Talania, Demapan, Manalo, and Elmer Esdrelon combining for 67 points. Tabora led Cholos with his 18 markers, while Ritual and Steve Rasa were the only two other double-figure scores for the team, chipping in 16 and 10, respectively.

Meanwhile, VM Production took the first semis berth in the masters division after winning via forfeit against the second-seeded Blue Haus, whose players left the playing venue a few minutes before the match was scheduled to start, according to league officials.

Blue Haus 96 – De Dios 21, Fernando 18, Talania 15, Demapan 12, Esdrelon 11, Manalo 11, Moises 6.

Cholos 8th Division 82 – Tabora 18, Ritual 16, Rasa 10, Norita 7, Laguimdam 7, Hernandez 6, Capalad 6, Lizama 4, Lerio 2.

Scoring by quarters: 31-21, 60-39, 79-60, 96-82.

BABAUTA

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out of 11,343.

"Not bad, but I wanted to beat the 5-hour mark. However, there were a lot of people in the race area and it took me 17 minutes just to get to the starting line," the 47-year-old runner said.

The Honolulu Marathon held last Dec. 13 was Babauta's third 42.195K event. His previous two were the Guam and Saipan marathons. He also completed the Honolulu Marathon just a week after participating in the 2015 Hell of Marianas Century Cycle Race.

"I added it (Honolulu Marathon) to my bucket list early this year after Guam and Saipan marathons. I did these races for personal satisfaction," said Babauta, who also saw action in Tagaman and XTERRA triathlons, Tour De Tinian, and a couple of local bike and run races this year.

Babauta trained for the Honolulu Marathon for three and a half months, biking and running two to three times a week. He had long runs on weekends.

Though he failed to meet his target time, Babauta was happy to complete the race and have his wife Linda and former Saipan residents greet him at the finish line.

"My wife was there and Team DFS Family—general manager for Waikiki T-Galleria Bruce Lorange and his Yurie assistant and general manager for operations Wolf Mojica and his wife Gezzel. I want to go back to Honolulu and beat my time," Babauta said.

Kenya's Filex Kiprotich was the overall top finisher in this year's Honolulu Marathon, clocking in at 2:11:43, while his compatriot Joyce Chepkirui ruled the women's division after submitting 2:28:34.

34th Christmas Island Relay

PHOTOS By JON PEREZ

Team GetFit CNMI "Darkhorse" members sprint toward the finish line of last Saturday's 34th Christmas Island Relay that ended at the Last Command Post in Marpi.

Kimiko McKagan, back from left, and Laurie Hutchinson join their teammates in a frenetic dash to the finish line.

Some runners get into the Christmas spirit.

Four of Team BANMI's members run barefoot.

Agape Christian School's Team 2 runners raise their arms as they approach the finish line. Jonah Chen Du Yang, Henry Hu En Jie, Leo Li Yisheng, Jonathan Xiang Lue, and Bobby Zhang Tian Rui are the members.

Robert Torres, right, and members of his team enjoy the jog.

Pat Alepuyo, left, and his teammates slow down as they near the finish line.

From left, brothers Akira and Wataru Kadokura, Taiyo Akimaru, Taiga Sato, and Lennosuke Suzuki run together toward the finish line.

Two members of Team Musketeers celebrate as they near completion of the race.

U.S. Army servicemen and reservists are among the participants in the annual race.

Spurs top Pacers for 6th victory in a row

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Blue Haus makes division finals

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

Blue Haus eased its way into the west division finals of the 2015 San Antonio Community Action Network Basketball League following a 96-82 win against Cholos 8th Division last Monday at the San Antonio court.

Blue Haus got off to a strong start and was never threatened to nail the first finals berth in the division. GMJ/IKKI and Pacific Islands Club will contest the second and last finals ticket as they are likely to resume their rained-halted game next week after the league's Christmas break.

It will be a Merry Christmas for Blue Haus as it is just one win away from clinching the championship. The team moved closer to the Promised Land, as it was on target right at the get-go, scoring 31 points against the 21 of Cholos.

Marlon De Dios led Blue Haus' early attack, as he tallied 8 points. Four of his teammates added at least two field goals apiece to give Blue Haus the double-digit lead after the first period.

In the second canto, Blue Haus was still on fire, scoring 29 more points to widen the gap at halftime, 60-39. The trio of De Dios, Angelo Fernando, and Brendon Talania sustained Blue Haus' strong start in the next frame, as they combined for 21 points and outgunned the entire Cholos crew.

Blue Haus then kept its safe distance in the third period despite being outscored by Cholos for the first time, 21-19. Again, De Dios, Fernando, and Talania managed to contribute to Blue Haus' cause in the third quarter and drew some support from Manolo Manalo and Bart Demapan to protect their double-digit advantage.

Still up by 19, Blue Haus was

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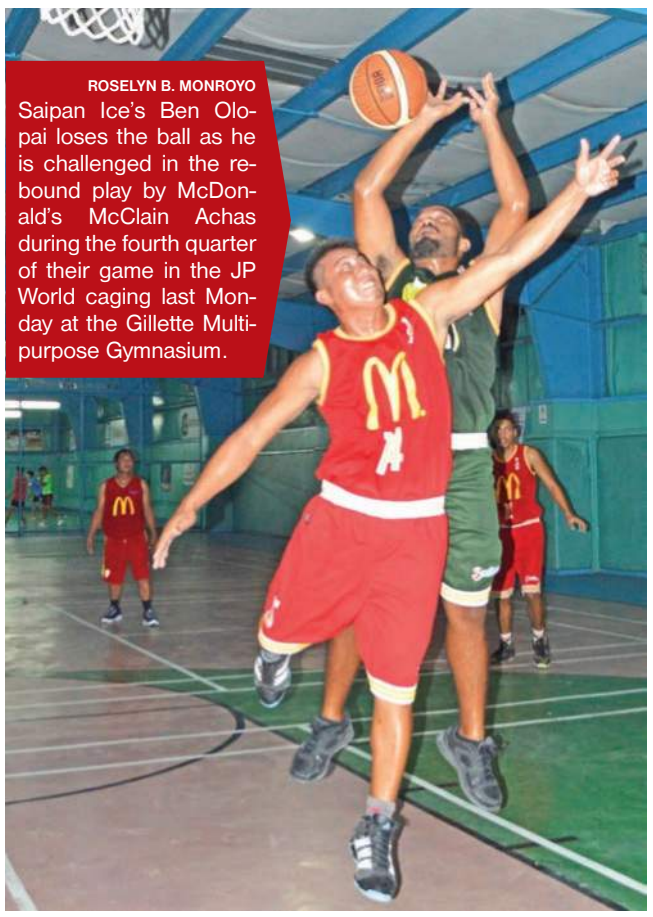
ROSELYN B. MONROYO
Blue Haus' Manolo Manalo dribbles out of the defense of GMI Market's Ben Petersburg during an earlier game in the Open division of the San Antonio caging at the San Antonio court. Manalo was one of the double-figure scorers in Blue Haus' 96-82 win in the semis against Cholos.

Saipan Ice finishes strong



ROSELYN B. MONROYO
Saipan Ice's Ben Olopai loses the ball as he is challenged in the rebound play by McDonald's McClain Achas during the fourth quarter of their game in the JP World caging last Monday at the Gillette Multipurpose Gymnasium.

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

Saipan Ice & Water wrapped up its regular season campaign in the 2nd JP World Corp. Customer Appreciation Basketball League with a come-from-behind 82-68 victory against McDonald's last Monday night at the Gillette Multipurpose Gymnasium.

Saipan Ice finished the single-round robin elimination with an even 4-4 record, winning its last three games and moving up to the top half of the team standings in the nine-squad field after staying at the bottom midway in the competition. McDonald's ended the regular season on a roller-coaster mode, as it dropped to a 3-5 slate.

McDonald's had a good chance to win its last game in the elimination when it led by double figures after the first half, 39-27. McDonald's peppered Saipan Ice with triples in the second quarter to turn a 3-point deficit, 11-14, to a 12-point advantage. Sherwin Gaspar knocked in four treys, while Joe Ayuyu and Michael Achas made one apiece to put McDonald's one top after the

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Ben Babauta, right, poses with one of the volunteers at the Honolulu Marathon after completing the race.

Ben Babauta completes last marathon for 2015

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

The CNMI was represented in the Honolulu Marathon as Ben Babauta was among the more than 10,000 men's finishers in the annual race held early this month.

"It's an unbelievable experience because it's one of the biggest races in the U.S.," said Babauta, who completed the 26.2-mile run in 5:21:00.

According to Babauta, 33,000 did the race that started at Ala Mauna Beach Park and had runners going to downtown Honolulu, looping back to Waikiki Beach, up to Diamond Head, then to Kahala, passing Kawaikui Beach Park, Maunalua Bay Beach Park (24K marker and turnaround) and back to Diamond Head for the finish at Kapiolani Park.

Babauta competed in the 45 to 49 age group and was at No. 445 out of 1,145 finishers in his division. In the men's overall division, he placed at No. 4,092

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